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THE WOLF-LEADER

THE NOVELS OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS

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THE WOLF-LEADER

THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO
(Abridged)

THE WOLF-LEADER

BY

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

TRANSLATED BY

ALFRED ALLINSON

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INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH the introductory chapters were not signed until May 31st, 1856, *The Wolf-Leader* is to be associated in conception with the group of romances which Dumas wrote at Brussels between the years 1852 and 1854, that is to say, after his financial failure and the consequent defection of his collaborator Maquet, and before his return to Paris to found his journal *Le Mousquetaire*. Like *Conscience, l'Innocent* and *Catherine Blum*, which date from that period of exile, the present story was inspired by reminiscences of our author's native place—Villers-Cotterets, in the department of the Aisne.

In *The Wolf-Leader* Dumas, however, allows his imagination and fancy full play. Using a legend told to him nearly half a century before, conjuring up the scenes of his boyhood, and calling into requisition his wonderful gift of improvisation, he contrives in the happiest way to weave a romance in which are combined a weird tale of *diablerie* and continual delightful glimpses of forest life. Terror, woodcraft, and humour could not be more felicitously intermingled. The reader, while kept under the spell of the main theme of the story, experiences all the charm of an open-air life in the great forest of Villers-Cotterets—the forest in which the little town seemed to occupy a small clearing, and into which the boy Alexandre occasionally escaped for days together from the irksome routine of the school or from the hands of relatives who wanted to make a priest of him.

Thus Dumas, the most impressionable of men, all his life remained grateful to the forest for the poetic fancies derived from its beauty and the mysteries of

its recesses, as well as for the hiding-places it afforded him, and for the game and birds which he soon learnt to shoot and snare there. Listen to his indignation at the destruction of the trees in the neighbouring park. We quote from his *Memoirs*: "That park, planted by François I., was cut down by Louis Philippe. Beautiful trees! under whose shade once reclined François I. and Madame d'Etampes, Henri II. and Diana of Poitiers, Henri IV. and Gabrielle, you have a right to believe that a Bourbon would have respected you, that you would have lived your long life—the life of beech trees and oaks; that the birds would have warbled on your branches when green and leafy. But over and above your inestimable value of poetry and memories, you had, unhappily, a material value. You beautiful beeches with your polished silvery cases! you beautiful oaks with your sombre wrinkled bark!—you were worth a hundred thousand crowns. The King of France, who, with his six millions of private revenue, was too poor to keep you—the King of France sold you. For my part, had you been my sole fortune, I would have preserved you; for, poet as I am, there is one thing that I would set before all the gold of the earth, and that is the murmur of the wind in your leaves; the shadow that you made to flicker beneath my feet; the sweet visions, the charming phantoms which, at evening time, betwixt the day and night, in twilight's doubtful hour would glide between your age-long trunks as glide the shadows of the ancient Abencerrages amid the thousand columns of Cordova's royal mosque."

The Wolf-Leader was published in 1857, in three volumes (Paris: Cadot). Dumas reprinted it in his journal *Le Monte-Cristo* in 1860.

R. S. G.

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THE WOLF-LEADER

INTRODUCTORY

WHO MOCQUET WAS, AND HOW THIS TALE BECAME KNOWN TO THE NARRATOR

I

WHY, I ask myself, during those first twenty years of my literary life, from 1827 to 1847, did I so rarely turn my eyes and thoughts towards the little town where I was born, towards the woods amid which it lies embowered, and the villages that cluster round it? How was it that during all that time the world of my youth seemed to me to have disappeared, as if hidden behind a cloud, whilst the future which lay before me shone clear and resplendent, like those magic islands which Columbus and his companions mistook for baskets of flowers floating on the sea?

Alas! simply because during the first twenty years of our life, we have Hope for our guide, and during the last twenty, Reality.

From the hour when, weary with our journey, we ungird ourselves, and dropping the traveller's staff, sit down by the wayside, we begin to look back over the road that we have traversed; for it is the way ahead that now is dark and misty, and so we turn and gaze into the depths of the past.

Then with the wide desert awaiting us in front, we are astonished, as we look along the path which

we have left behind, to catch sight of first one and then another of those delicious oases of verdure and shade, beside which we never thought of lingering for a moment, and which, indeed we had passed by almost without notice.

But, then, how quickly our feet carried us along in those days! we were in such a hurry to reach that goal of happiness to which no road has ever yet brought any one of us.

It is at this point that we begin to see how blind and ungrateful we have been; it is now that we say to ourselves, if we could but once more come across such a green and wooded resting-place, we would stay there for the rest of our lives, would pitch our tent there, and there end our days.

But the body cannot go back and renew its existence, and so memory has to make its pious pilgrimage alone; back to the early days and fresh beginnings of life it travels, like those light vessels that are borne upward by their white sails against the current of a river. Then the body once more pursues its journey; but the body without memory is as the night without stars, as the lamp without its flame. . . . And so body and memory go their several ways.

The body, with chance for its guide, moves towards the unknown.

Memory, that bright will-o'-the-wisp, hovers over the landmarks that are left behind; and memory, we may be sure, will not lose her way. Every oasis is re-visited, every association recalled, and then with a rapid flight she returns to the body that grows ever more and more weary, and like the humming of a bee, like the song of a bird, like the murmur of a stream, tells the tale of all that she has seen.

And as the tired traveller listens, his eyes grow bright again, his mouth smiles, and a light steals over his face. For Providence in kindness, seeing that he cannot return to youth, allows youth to return to him. And ever after he loves to repeat aloud what memory tells him in her soft, low voice.

And is our life, then, bounded by a circle like the

earth? Do we, unconsciously, continue to walk towards the spot from which we started? And as we travel nearer and nearer to the grave, do we again draw closer, ever closer, to the cradle?

II

I CANNOT say. But what happened to myself, that much at any rate I know. At my first halt along the road of life, my first glance backwards, I began by relating the tale of Bernard and his Uncle Berthelin, then the story of Ange Pitou and his fair *fiancée*, and of Aunt Angélique; after that I told of Conscience and Mariette; and lastly of Catherine Blum and Father Vatrin.

I am now going to tell you the story of Thibault and his wolves, and of the Lord of Vez. And how, you will ask, did I become acquainted with the events which I am now about to bring before you? I will tell you.

Have you read my *Mémoires*, and do you remember one, by name Mocquet, who was a friend of my father's?

If you have read them, you will have some vague recollection of this personage. If you have not read them, you will not remember anything about him at all.

In either case, then, it is of the first importance that I should bring Mocquet clearly before your mind's eye.

As far back as I can remember, that is when I was about three years of age, we lived, my father and mother and I, in a Château called Les Fossés, situated on the boundary that separates the departments of Aisne and Oise, between Haramont and Longpré. The little house in question had doubtless been named Les Fossés on account of the deep and broad moat, filled with water, with which it was surrounded.

I do not mention my sister, for she was at school in Paris, and we only saw her once a year, when she was home for a month's holiday.

The household, apart from my father, mother and myself, consisted—firstly: of a large black dog, called Truffe, who was a privileged animal and made welcome wherever he appeared, more especially as I regularly went about on his back; secondly: of a gardener, named Pierre, who kept me amply provided with frogs and snakes, two species of living creatures in which I was particularly interested; thirdly: of a negro, a valet of my father's, named Hippolyte, a sort of black merry-andrew, whom my father, I believe, only kept that he might be well primed with anecdotes wherewith to gain the advantage in his encounters with Brunel * and beat his wonderful stories; fourthly: of a keeper named Mocquet, for whom I had a great admiration, seeing that he had magnificent stories to tell of ghosts and were-wolves, to which I listened every evening, and which were abruptly broken off the instant the General—as my father was usually called—appeared on the scene; fifthly: of a cook, who answered to the name of Marie, but this figure I can no longer recall, it is lost to me in the misty twilight of life; I remember only the name, as given to someone of whom but a shadowy outline remains in my memory, and about whom, as far as I recollect, there was nothing of a very poetic character.

Mocquet, however, is the only person that need occupy our attention for the present. Let me try to make him known to you, both as regards his personal appearance and his character.

* See *Mémoires.*

III

MOCQUET was a man of about forty years of age, short, thick-set, broad of shoulder, and sturdy of leg. His skin was burnt brown by the sun, his eyes were small and piercing, his hair grizzled, and his black whiskers met under his chin in a half circle.

As I look back, his figure rises before me, wearing a three-cornered hat, and clad in a green waistcoat with silver buttons, velveteen cord breeches, and high leathern gaiters, with a game-bag over his shoulder, his gun in his hand, and a cutty-pipe in his mouth.

Let us pause for a moment to consider this pipe, for this pipe grew to be, not merely an accessory, but an integral part of Mocquet. Nobody could remember ever having seen Mocquet without it. If by any chance Mocquet did not happen to have it in his mouth, he had it in his hand.

This pipe, having to accompany Mocquet into the heart of the thickest coverts, it was necessary that it should be of such a kind as to offer the least possible opportunity to any other solid body of bringing about its destruction; for the destruction of his old, well-coloured cutty would have been to Mocquet a loss that years alone could have repaired. Therefore the stem of Mocquet's pipe was not more than half an inch long; moreover you might always wager that half that half inch at least was supplied by the quill of a feather.

This habit of never being without his pipe, which, by causing the almost entire disappearance of both canines, had hollowed out a sort of vice for itself on the left side of his mouth, between the fourth incisor and the first molar, had given rise to another of Mocquet's habits; this was to speak with his teeth clenched, whereby a certain impression of obstinacy was conveyed by all he said. This became

even more marked if Mocquet chanced at any moment to take his pipe out of his mouth, for there was nothing then to prevent the jaws closing and the teeth coming together in a way which prevented the words passing through them at all except in a sort of whistle, which was hardly intelligible.

Such was Mocquet with respect to outward appearance. In the following pages I will endeavour to give some idea of his intellectual capacity and moral qualities.

IV

EARLY one morning, before my father had risen, Mocquet walked into his room, and planted himself at the foot of the bed, stiff and upright as a sign-post.

"Well, Mocquet," said my father, "what's the matter now? what gives me the pleasure of seeing you here at this early hour?"

"The matter is, General," replied Mocquet with the utmost gravity, "the matter is that I am *nightmared*."

Mocquet had, quite unawares to himself, enriched the language with a double verb, both active and passive.

"You are *nightmared?*" responded my father, raising himself on his elbow. "Dear, dear, that's a serious matter, my poor Mocquet."

"You are right there, General."

And Mocquet took his pipe out of his mouth, a thing he did rarely, and only on the most important occasions.

"And how long have you been *nightmared?*" continued my father compassionately.

"For a whole week, General."

"And who by, Mocquet?"

"Ah! I know very well who by," answered Mocquet, through his teeth, which were so much the more tightly closed that his pipe was in his hand, and his hand behind his back.

"And may I also know by whom?"

"By Mother Durand, of Haramont, who, as you will have heard, is an old witch."

"No, indeed, I assure you I had no idea of such a thing."

"Ah! but I know it well enough; I've seen her riding past on her broomstick to her Witches' Sabbath."

"You have seen her go by on her broomstick?"

"As plainly as I see you, General; and more than that, she has an old black billy-goat at home that she worships."

"And why should she come and nightmare you?"

"To revenge herself on me, because I came upon her once at midnight on the heath of Gondreville, when she was dancing round and round in her devil's circle."

"This is a most serious accusation which you bring against her, my friend; and before repeating to anyone what you have been telling me in private, I think it would be as well if you tried to collect some more proofs."

"Proofs! What more proofs do I want! Does not every soul in the village know that in her youth she was the Mistress of Thibault, the wolf-leader?"

"Indeed! I must look carefully into this matter, Mocquet."

"I am looking very carefully into it myself, and she shall pay for it, the old mole!"

Old mole was an expression that Mocquet had borrowed from his friend Pierre, the gardener, who, as he had no worse enemies to deal with than moles, gave the name of mole to everything and everybody that he particularly detested.

V

"I MUST look carefully into this matter"—these words were not said by my father by reason of any belief he had in the truth of Mocquet's tale about his nightmare; and even the fact of the nightmare being admitted by him, he gave no credence to the idea that it was Mother Durand who had *nightmared* the keeper. Far from it; but my father was not ignorant of the superstitions of the people, and he knew that belief in spells was still widespread among the peasantry in the country districts. He had heard of terrible acts of revenge carried out by the victims on some man or woman who they thought had bewitched them, in the belief that the charm would thus be broken; and Mocquet, while he stood denouncing Mother Durand to my father, had had such an accent of menace in his voice, and had given such a grip to his gun, that my father thought it wise to appear to agree with everything he said, in order to gain his confidence and so prevent him doing anything without first consulting him.

So, thinking that he had so far gained an influence over Mocquet, my father ventured to say:

"But before you make her pay for it, my good Mocquet, you ought to be quite sure that no one can cure you of your nightmare."

"No one can cure me, General," replied Mocquet in a tone of conviction.

"How! No one able to cure you?"

"No one; I have tried the impossible."

"And how did you try?"

"First of all, I drank a large bowl of hot wine before going to bed."

"And who recommended that remedy? was it Monsieur Lécosse?" Monsieur Lécosse was the doctor in repute at Villers-Cotterets.

"Monsieur Lécosse?" exclaimed Mocquet. "No,

indeed! What should he know about spells! By my faith, no! it was not Monsieur Lécosse."

"Who was it, then?"

"It was the shepherd of Longpré."

"But a bowl of wine, you dunderhead! Why, you must have been dead drunk."

"The shepherd drank half of it."

"I see; now I understand why he prescribed it. And did the bowl of wine have any effect?"

"Not any, General; she came trampling over my chest that night, just as if I had taken nothing."

"And what did you do next? You were not obliged, I suppose, to limit your efforts to your bowl of hot wine?"

"I did what I do when I want to catch a *wily beast*."

Mocquet made use of a phraseology which was all his own; no one had ever succeeded in inducing him to say a *wild beast;* every time my father said *wild beast*, Mocquet would answer, "Yes, General, I know, a *wily beast*."

"You still stick to your *wily beast*, then?" my father said to him on one occasion.

"Yes, General, but not out of obstinacy."

"And why then, may I ask?"

"Because, General, with all due respect to you, you are mistaken about it."

"Mistaken? I? How?"

"Because you ought not to say a *wild beast*, but a *wily beast*."

"And what is a *wily beast*, Mocquet?"

"It is an animal that only goes about at night; that is, an animal that creeps into the pigeon-houses and kills the pigeons, like the pole-cat, or into the chicken-houses, to kill the chickens, like the fox; or into the folds, to kill the sheep, like the wolf; it means an animal which is cunning and deceitful, in short, a *wily beast*."

It was impossible to find anything to say after such a logical definition as this. My father, therefore, remained silent, and Mocquet, feeling that he had gained a victory, continued to call *wild beasts*,

wily beasts, utterly unable to understand my father's obstinacy in continuing to call *wily beasts, wild beasts*.

So now you understand why, when my father asked him what else he had done, Mocquet answered, "I did what I do when I catch a *wily beast*."

We have interrupted the conversation to give this explanation; but as there was no need of explanation between my father and Mocquet, they had gone on talking, you must understand, without any such break.

VI

"AND what is it you do, Mocquet, when you want to catch this animal of yours?" asked my father.

"I set a *trarp*, General." Mocquet always called a trap a trarp.

"Do you mean to tell me you have set a trap to catch Mother Durand?"

My father had of course said *trap;* but Mocquet did not like anyone to pronounce words differently from himself, so he went on:

"Just so, General; I have set a *trarp* for Mother Durand."

"And where have you put your *trarp?* Outside your door?"

My father, you see, was willing to make concessions.

"Outside my door! Much good that would be! I only know she gets into my room, but I cannot even guess which way she comes."

"Down the chimney, perhaps?"

"There is no chimney, and besides, I never see her until I feel her."

"And you do see her then?"

"As plainly I see you, General."

"And what does she do?"

"Nothing agreeable, you may be sure; she

tramples all over my chest: thud, thud! thump, thump!"

"Well, where *have* you set your trap, then?"

"The *trarp*, why, I put it on my own stomach."

"And what kind of a *trarp* did you use?"

"Oh! a first-rate *trarp!*"

"What was it?"

"The one I made to catch the grey wolf with, that used to kill M. Destournelles' sheep."

"Not such a first-rate one, then, for the grey wolf ate up your bait, and then bolted."

"You know why he was not caught, General."

"No, I do not."

"Because it was the black wolf that belonged to old Thibault, the sabot-maker."

"It could not have been Thibault's black wolf, for you said yourself just this moment that the wolf that used to come and kill M. Destournelles' sheep was a grey one."

"He is grey now, General; but thirty years ago, when Thibault the sabot-maker was alive, he was black; and, to assure you of the truth of this, look at my hair, which was black as a raven's thirty years ago, and now is as grey as the Doctor's."

The Doctor was a cat, an animal of some fame, that you will find mentioned in my *Mémoires* and known as the Doctor on account of the magnificent fur which nature had given it for a coat.

"Yes," replied my father, "I know your tale about Thibault, the sabot-maker; but, if the black wolf is the devil, Mocquet, as you say he is, he would not change colour."

"Not at all, General; only it takes him a hundred years to become quite white, and the last midnight of every hundred years, he turns black as a coal again."

"I give up the case, then, Mocquet; all I ask is, that you will not tell my son this fine tale of yours, until he is fifteen at least."

"And why, General?"

"Because it is no use stuffing his mind with nonsense of that kind, until he is old enough to

laugh at wolves, whether they are white, grey or black."

"It shall be as you say, General; he shall hear nothing of this matter."

"Go on, then."

"Where had we got to, General?"

"We had got to your *trarp*, which you had put on your stomach, and you were saying that it was a first-rate *trarp*."

"By my faith, General, that was a first-rate *trarp!* It weighed a good ten pounds. What am I saying? fifteen pounds at least with its chain! I put the chain over my wrist."

"And what happened that night?"

"That night? why, it was worse than ever! Generally, it was in her leather overshoes she came and kneaded my chest, but that night she came in her wooden *sabots*."

"And she comes like this . . . . ?"

"Every blessed one of God's nights, and it is making me quite thin; you can see for yourself, General, I am growing as thin as a lath. However, this morning I made up my mind."

"And what did you decide upon, Mocquet?"

"Well, then, I made up my mind I would let fly at her with my gun."

"That was a wise decision to come to. And when do you think of carrying it out?"

"This evening, or to-morrow at latest, General."

"Confound it! And just as I was wanting to send you over to Villers-Hellon."

"That won't matter, General. Was it something that you wanted done at once?"

"Yes, at once."

"Very well, then, I can go over to Villers-Hellon—it's not above a few miles, if I go through the wood—and get back here this evening; the journey both ways is only twenty-four miles, and we have covered a few more than that before now out shooting, General."

"That's settled, then; I will write a letter for you to give to M. Collard, and then you can start."

"I will start, General, without a moment's delay."

My father rose, and wrote to M. Collard; the letter was as follows:

"My dear Collard,

"I am sending you that idiot of a keeper of mine, whom you know; he has taken into his head that an old woman *nightmares* him every night, and, to rid himself of this vampire, he intends nothing more nor less than to kill her.

"Justice, however, might not look favourably on this method of his for curing himself of indigestion, and so I am going to start him off to you on a pretext of some kind or other. Will you, also, on some pretext or other, send him on, as soon as he gets to you, to Danré, at Vouty, who will send him on to Dulauloy, who, with or without pretext, may then, as far as I care, send him on to the devil?

"In short, he must be kept going for a fortnight at least. By that time we shall have moved out of here and shall be at Antilly, and as he will then no longer be in the district of Haramont, and as his nightmare will probably have left him on the way, Mother Durand will be able to sleep in peace, which I should certainly not advise her to do if Mocquet were remaining anywhere in her neighbourhood.

"He is bringing you six brace of snipe and a hare, which we shot while out yesterday on the marshes of Vallue.

"A thousand-and-one of my tenderest remembrances to the fair Herminie, and as many kisses to the dear little Caroline.

"Your friend,

"Alex. Dumas."

An hour later Mocquet was on his way, and, at the end of three weeks, he rejoined us at Antilly.

"Well," asked my father, seeing him reappear in

robust health, "well, and how about Mother Durand?"

"Well, General," replied Mocquet cheerfully, "I've got rid of the old mole; it seems she has no power except in her own district."

VII

TWELVE years had passed since Mocquet's nightmare, and I was now over fifteen years of age. It was the winter of 1817 to 1818; ten years before that date I had, alas! lost my father.

We no longer had a Pierre for gardener, a Hippolyte for valet, or a Mocquet for keeper; we no longer lived at the Château of Les Fossés or in the villa at Antilly, but in the market-place of Villers-Cotterets, in a little house opposite the fountain, where my mother kept a *bureau de tabac*, selling powder and shot as well over the same counter.

As you have already read in my *Mémoires*, although still young, I was an enthusiastic sportsman. As far as sport went, however, that is according to the usual acceptation of the word, I had none, except when my cousin, M. Deviolaine, the ranger of the forest at Villers-Cotterets, was kind enough to ask leave of my mother to take me with him. I filled up the remainder of my time with poaching.

For this double function of sportsman and poacher I was well provided with a delightful single-barrelled gun, on which was engraven the monogram of the Princess Borghese, to whom it had originally belonged. My father had given it me when I was a child, and when, after his death, everything had to be sold, I implored so urgently to be allowed to keep my gun, that it was not sold with the other weapons, and the horses and carriages.

The most enjoyable time for me was the winter; then the snow lay on the ground, and the birds, in

their search for food, were ready to come wherever grain was sprinkled for them. Some of my father's old friends had fine gardens, and I was at liberty to go and shoot the birds there as I liked. So I used to sweep the snow away, spread some grain, and, hiding myself within easy gun-shot, fire at the birds, sometimes killing six, eight, or even ten at a time.

Then, if the snow lasted, there was another thing to look forward to—the chance of tracing a wolf to its lair, and a wolf so traced was everybody's property. The wolf, being a public enemy, a murderer beyond the pale of the law, might be shot at by all or anyone, and so, in spite of my mother's cries, who dreaded the double danger for me, you need not ask if I seized my gun, and was first on the spot ready for sport.

The winter of 1817 to 1818 had been long and severe; the snow was lying a foot deep on the ground, and so hard frozen that it had held for a fortnight past, and still there were no tidings of anything.

Towards four o'clock one afternoon Mocquet called upon us; he had come to lay in his stock of powder. While so doing, he looked at me and winked with one eye. When he went out, I followed.

"What is it, Mocquet?" I asked, "tell me."

"Can't you guess, Monsieur Alexandre?"

"No, Mocquet."

"You don't guess, then, that if I come and buy powder here from Madame, your mother, instead of going to Haramont for it—in short, if I walk three miles instead of only a quarter that distance, that I might possibly have a bit of a shoot to propose to you?"

"Oh, you good Mocquet! and what and where?"

"There's a wolf, Monsieur Alexandre."

"Not really?"

"He carried off one of M. Destournelles' sheep last night, I have traced him to the Tillet woods."

"And what then?"

"Why then, I am certain to see him again to-night, and shall find out where his lair is, and

to-morrow morning we'll finish his business for him."

"Oh, this is luck!"

"Only, we must first ask leave . . ."

"Of whom, Mocquet?"

"Leave of Madame."

"All right, come in, then, we will ask her at once."

My mother had been watching us through the window; she suspected that some plot was hatching between us.

"I have no patience with you, Mocquet," she said, as we went in, "you have no sense or discretion."

"In what way, Madame?" asked Mocquet.

"To go exciting him in the way you do; he thinks too much of sport as it is."

"Nay, Madame, it is with him, as with dogs of breed; his father was a sportsman, he is a sportsman, and his son will be a sportsman after him; you must make up your mind to that."

"And supposing some harm should come to him?"

"Harm come to him with me? With Mocquet? No, indeed! I will answer for it with my own life, that he shall be safe. Harm happen to him, to him, the General's son? Never, never, never!"

But my poor mother shook her head; I went to her and flung my arms round her neck.

"Mother, dearest," I cried, "please let me go."

"You will load his gun for him, then, Mocquet?"

"Have no fear, sixty grains of powder, not a grain more or less, and a twenty to the pound bullet."

"And you will not leave him?"

"I will stay by him like his shadow."

"You will keep him near you?"

"Between my legs."

"I give him into your sole charge, Mocquet."

"And he shall be given back to you safe and sound. Now, Monsieur Alexandre, gather up your traps, and let us be off; your mother has given her permission."

"You are not taking him away this evening, Mocquet."

"I must, Madame, to-morrow morning will be too late to fetch him; we must hunt the wolf at dawn."

"The wolf! it is for a wolf-hunt that you are asking for him to go with you?"

"Are you afraid that the wolf will eat him?"

"Mocquet! Mocquet!"

"But when I tell you that I will be answerable for everything!"

"And where will the poor child sleep?"

"With father Mocquet, of course; he will have a good mattress laid on the floor, and sheets white as those which God has spread over the fields, and two good warm coverlids; I promise you that he shall not catch cold."

"I shall be all right, mother, you may be sure! Now then, Mocquet, I am ready."

"And you don't even give me a kiss, you poor boy, you!"

"Indeed, yes, dear mother, and a good many more than one!"

And I threw myself on my mother's neck, stifling her with my caresses as I clasped her in my arms.

"And when shall I see you again?"

"Oh, do not be uneasy if he does not return before to-morrow evening."

"How, to-morrow evening! and you spoke of starting at dawn!"

"At dawn for the wolf; but if we miss him, the lad must have a shot or two at the wild ducks on the marshes of Vallue."

"I see! you are going to drown him for me!"

"By the name of all that's good, Madame, if I was not speaking to the General's widow—I should say——"

"What, Mocquet? What would you say?"

"That you will make nothing but a wretched milksop of your boy. . . . If the General's mother had been always behind him, pulling at his coat-tails, as you are behind this child, he would never

even have had the courage to cross the sea to France."

"You are right, Mocquet! take him away! I am a poor fool."

And my mother turned aside, to wipe away a tear.

A mother's tear, that heart's diamond, more precious than all the pearls of Ophir! I saw it running down her cheek. I ran to the poor woman, and whispered to her, "Mother, if you like, I will stay at home."

"No, no, go, my child," she said, "Mocquet is right; you must, sooner or later, learn to be a man."

I gave her another last kiss; then I ran after Mocquet, who had already started.

After I had gone a few paces, I looked round; my mother had run into the middle of the road, that she might keep me in sight as long as possible; it was my turn now to wipe away a tear.

"How now?" said Mocquet, "you crying too, Monsieur Alexandre!"

"Nonsense, Mocquet! it's only the cold makes my eyes run."

But Thou, O God, Who gavest me that tear, Thou knowest that it was not because of the cold that I was crying.

VIII

IT was pitch dark when we reached Mocquet's house. We had a savoury omelette and stewed rabbit for supper, and then Mocquet made my bed ready for me. He kept his word to my mother, for I had a good mattress, two white sheets and two good warm coverlids.

"Now," said Mocquet, "tuck yourself in there, and go to sleep; we may probably have to be off at four o'clock to-morrow morning."

"At any hour you like, Mocquet."

"Yes, I know, you are a capital riser over night,

and to-morrow morning I shall have to throw a jug of cold water over you to make you get up."

"You are welcome to do that, Mocquet, if you have to call me twice."

"Well, we'll see about that."

"Are you in a hurry to go to sleep, Mocquet?"

"Why, whatever do you want me to do at this hour of the night?"

"I thought, perhaps, Mocquet, you would tell me one of those stories that I used to find so amusing when I was a child."

"And who is going to get up for me at two o'clock to-morrow, if I sit telling you tales till midnight? Our good priest, perhaps?"

"You are right, Mocquet."

"It's fortunate you think so!"

So I undressed and went to bed. Five minutes later Mocquet was snoring like a bass viol.

I turned and twisted for a good two hours before I could get to sleep. How many sleepless nights have I not passed on the eve of the first shoot of the season! At last, towards midnight fatigue gained the mastery over me. A sudden sensation of cold awoke me with a start at four o'clock in the morning; I opened my eyes. Mocquet had thrown my bed-clothes off over the foot of the bed, and was standing beside me, leaning both hands on his gun, his face beaming out upon me, as, at every fresh puff of his short pipe, the light from it illuminated his features.

"Well, how have you got on, Mocquet?"

"He has been tracked to his lair."

"The wolf? and who tracked him?"

"This foolish old Mocquet."

"Bravo!"

"But guess where he has chosen to take covert, this most accommodating of good wolves!"

"Where was it then, Mocquet?"

"If I give you a hundred chances you wouldn't guess! in the Three Oaks Covert."

"We've got him, then?"

"I should rather think so."

The Three Oaks Covert is a patch of trees a
undergrowth, about two acres in extent, situated
the middle of the plain of Largny, about fi
hundred paces from the forest.

"And the keepers?" I went on.

"All had notice sent them," replied Mocque
"Moynat, Mildet, Vatrin, Lafeuille, all the be
shots in short, are waiting in readiness just outsi
the forest. You and I, with Monsieur Charpentie
from Vallue, Monsieur Hochedez, from Largn
Monsieur Destournelles, from Les Fossés, are
surround the Covert; the dogs will be slipped, t
field-keeper will go with them, and we shall ha
him, that's certain."

"You'll put me in a good place, Mocquet?"

"Haven't I said that you will be near me; b
you must get up first."

"That's true——Brrou!"

"And I am going to have pity on your you
and put a bundle of wood in the fire-place."

"I didn't dare ask for it; but, on my word
honour, it will be kind of you if you will."

Mocquet went out and brought in an armful
wood from the timber-yard, and threw it on to th
hearth, poking it down with his foot; then he thre
a lighted match among the twigs, and in anoth
moment the clear bright flames were dancing an
crackling up the chimney. I went and sat on th
stool by the fireside, and there dressed myself; yo
may be sure that I was not long over my toilet; eve
Mocquet was astonished at my celerity.

"Now, then," he said, "a drop of this, and the
off!" And saying this, he filled two small glasse
with a yellowish coloured liquor, which did no
require any tasting on my part to recognise.

"You know I never drink brandy, Mocquet."

"Ah, you are your father's son, all over! Wha
will you have then?"

"Nothing, Mocquet, nothing."

"You know the proverb: 'Leave the hous
empty; the devil will be there.' Believe me, yo
had better put something into your stomach, whil

load your gun, for I must keep my promise to that
oor mother of yours."

"Well, then, I will have a crust of bread and a
ass of *pignolet*." *Pignolet* is a light wine made
non-winegrowing districts, generally said to
quire three men to drink it, one to drink, and two
hold him; I was, however, pretty well accustomed
pignolet, and could drink it up without any help.
I swallowed my glass of wine while Mocquet
aded my gun.

"What are you doing, Mocquet?" I asked him.

"Making a cross on your bullet," he replied.
As you will be near me, we shall probably let fly
gether, and, although I know you would give me
your share, still, for the glory of it, it will be
well to know which of us killed him, if the wolf
lls. So, mind you aim straight."

"I'll do my best, Mocquet."

"Here's your gun, then, loaded for bird-shooting;
d now, gun over your shoulder, and off we start."

IX

HE meeting-place was on the road leading to
Chavigny. Here we found the keepers and
me of the huntsmen, and within another ten
inutes those who were missing had also joined us.
efore five o'clock struck, our number was com-
ete, and then we held a council of war to decide
r further proceedings. It was finally arranged
at we should first take up our position round the
hree Oaks Covert at some considerable distance
om it, and then gradually advance so as to form
cordon round it. Everything was to be done with
e utmost silence, it being well known that wolves
camp on hearing the slightest noise. Each of us
as ordered to look carefully along the path he
llowed, to make quite sure that the wolf had not
ft the covert. Meanwhile the field-keeper was
olding Mocquet's hounds in leash.

One by one we took our stand facing the cove on the spot to which our particular path h conducted us. As it happened, Mocquet and found ourselves on the north side of the warre which was parallel with the forest.

Mocquet had rightly said that we should be the best place, for the wolf would in all probabili try and make for the forest, and so would break cove on our side of it.

We took our stand, each in front of an oak tre fifty paces apart from one another, and then v waited, without moving, and hardly daring breathe. The dogs on the farther side of the warre were now uncoupled; they gave two short bark and were then silent. The keeper followed the into the covert, calling halloo as he beat the tre with his stick. But the dogs, their eyes startin out of their heads, their lips drawn back, and the coats bristling, remained as if nailed to the groun Nothing would induce them to move a step furthe

"Halloa, Mocquet!" cried the keeper, "th wolf of yours must be an extra plucky one, Rocad and Tombelle refuse to tackle him."

But Mocquet was too wise to make any answe for the sound of his voice would have warned th wolf that there were enemies in that direction.

The keeper went forward, still beating the tree the two dogs after him cautiously advancing ste by step, without a bark, only now and then givin a low growl.

All of a sudden there was a loud exclamation fro the keeper, who called out, "I nearly trod on hi tail! the wolf! the wolf! Look out, Mocquet, loo out!"

And at that moment something came rushin towards us, and the animal leapt out of the cover passing between us like a flash of lightning. It wa an enormous wolf, nearly white with age. Mocque turned and sent two bullets after him; I saw then bound and rebound along the snow.

"Shoot, shoot!" he called out to me.

Only then did I bring my gun to the shoulder

I took aim, and fired; the wolf made a movement as if he wanted to bite his shoulder.

"We have him! we have him!" cried Mocquet, "the lad has hit his mark! Success to the innocent!"

But the wolf ran on, making straight for Moynat and Mildet, the two best shots in the country round.

Both their first shots were fired at him in the open; the second, after he had entered the forest.

The two first bullets were seen to cross one another, and ran along the ground, sending up spurts of snow; the wolf had escaped them both, but he had no doubt been struck down by the others; that the two keepers who had just fired should miss their aim, was an unheard of thing. I had seen Moynat kill seventeen snipe one after the other; I had seen Mildet cut a squirrel in two as he was jumping from tree to tree.

The keepers went into the forest after the wolf; we looked anxiously towards the spot where they had disappeared. We saw them reappear, dejected, and shaking their heads.

"Well?" cried Mocquet interrogatively.

"Bah!" answered Mildet, with an impatient movement of his arm, "he's at Taille-Fontaine by this time."

"At Taille-Fontaine!" exclaimed Mocquet, completely taken aback. "What! the fools have gone and missed him, then!"

"Well, what of that? you missed him yourself, did you not?"

Mocquet shook his head.

"Well, well, there's some devilry about this," he said. "That I should miss him was surprising, but it was perhaps possible; but that Moynat should have shot twice and missed him is not possible, no, I say, no."

"Nevertheless, so it is, my good Mocquet."

"Besides, you, you hit him," he said to me.

"I! . . . are you sure?"

"We others may well be ashamed to say it. But as sure as my name is Mocquet, you hit the wolf."

"Well, it's easy to find out if I did hit him, there would be blood on the snow. Come, Mocquet, let us run and see." And suiting the action to the word, I set off running.

"Stop, stop, do not run, whatever you do," cried Mocquet, clenching his teeth and stamping. "We must go quietly, until we know better what we have to deal with."

"Well, we will go quietly, then; but at any rate, let us go!"

Mocquet then began to follow the wolf's track, step by step.

"There's not much fear of losing it," I said.

"It's plain enough."

"Yes, but that's not what I am looking for."

"What are you looking for, then?"

"You will know in a minute or two."

The other huntsmen had now joined us, and as they came along after us, the keeper related to them what had taken place. Meanwhile, Mocquet and I continued to follow the wolf's footprints, which were deeply indented in the snow. At last we came to the spot where he had received my fire.

"There, Mocquet," I said to him, "you see I did miss him after all!"

"How do you know that you missed him?"

"Because there are no blood marks."

"Look for the mark of your bullet, then, in the snow."

I looked to see which way my bullet would have sped if it had not hit the wolf, and then went in that direction; but I tracked for more than a quarter of a mile to no purpose, so I thought I might as well go back to Mocquet. He beckoned to the keepers to approach, and then turning to me, said:—

"Well, and the bullet?"

"I cannot find it."

"I have been luckier than you, then, for I have found it."

"What, you found it?"

"Right about and come behind me."

I did as I was told, and the huntsmen having come

up, Mocquet pointed out a line to them beyond which they were not to pass. The keepers Mildet and Moynat now joined us. "Well?" said Mocquet to them in their turn.

"Missed," they both answered at once.

"I saw you had missed him in the open, but when he had reached covert . . . ?"

"Missed him there too."

"Are you sure?"

"Both the bullets have been found, each of them in the trunk of a tree."

"It is almost past belief," said Vatrin.

"Yes," rejoined Mocquet, "it is almost past belief, but I have something to show you which is even more difficult to believe."

"Show it us, then."

"Look there, what do you see on the snow?"

"The track of a wolf; what of that?"

"And close to the mark of the right foot—there—what do you see?"

"A little hole."

"Well, do you understand?"

The keepers looked at each other in astonishment.

"Do you understand now?" repeated Mocquet.

"The thing's impossible!" exclaimed the keepers.

"Nevertheless it is so, and I will prove it to you."

And so saying, Mocquet plunged his hand into the snow, felt about a moment or two, and then, with a cry of triumph, pulled out a flattened bullet.

"Why, that's my bullet," I said.

"You recognise it, then?"

"Of course I do, you marked it for me."

"And what mark did I put on it?"

"A cross."

"You see, sirs," said Mocquet.

"Yes, but explain how this happened."

"This is it; he could turn aside the ordinary bullets, but he had no power over the youngster's, which was marked with a cross; it hit him in the shoulder, I saw him make a movement as if to try and bite himself."

"But," I broke in, astonished at the silence and

amazement which had fallen on the keepers, "if my bullet hit him in the shoulder, why did it not kill him?"

"Because it was made neither of gold nor of silver, my dear boy; and because no bullets but those that are made of gold or silver can pierce the skin of the devil, or kill those who have made a compact with him."

"But, Mocquet" said the keepers, shuddering, "do you really think . . . ?"

"Think? Yes, I do! I could swear that we have had to do this morning with Thibault the sabot-maker's wolf."

The huntsman and keepers looked at one another; two or three of them made the sign of the cross; and they all appeared to share Mocquet's opinion, and to know quite well what he meant by Thibault's wolf. I, alone, knew nothing about it, and therefore asked impatiently, "What is this wolf, and who is this Thibault, the sabot-maker?"

Mocquet hesitated before replying, then, "Ah! to be sure!" he exclaimed, "the General told me that I might let you know about it when you were fifteen. You are that age now, are you not?"

"I am sixteen," I replied with some pride.

"Well, then, my dear Monsieur Alexandre, Thibault the sabot-maker's wolf, is the devil. You were asking me last night for a tale, were you not?"

"Yes."

"Come back home with me this morning, then, and I will tell you a tale, and a fine one too."

The keepers and huntsmen shook hands with one another in silence and separated, each going his own way; I went back with Mocquet, who then told me the tale which you shall now hear.

Perhaps you will ask me why, having heard it so long ago, I have not told it before. I can only answer you by saying it has remained hidden away in a drawer of my memory, which has remained closed ever since, and which I only opened again three days ago. I would tell you what induced me

to do this, but you might, I fear, find the recital somewhat tedious, and as it would take time, I prefer starting at once upon my tale.

I say my tale; I ought perhaps to call it Mocquet's tale—but, upon my word! when you have been sitting on an egg for thirty-eight years, you may be excused for coming to believe at last that you've laid it yourself!

CHAPTER I

THE GRAND MASTER OF HIS HIGHNESS'S WOLF HOUNDS

THE Seigneur Jean, Baron of Vez, was a hardy and indefatigable sportsman.

If you follow the beautiful valley which runs between Berval and Longpré, you will see, on your left hand, an old tower, which by reason of its isolated position will appear doubly high and formidable to you.

At the present moment it belongs to an old friend of the writer of this tale, and everyone is now so accustomed to its forbidding aspect that the peasant passing that way in summer has no more fear of seeking shelter from the heat beneath its walls than the martins with their long black wings and shrill cries, and the swallows with their soft chirrupings, have of building their nests under its eaves.

But at the time we are now speaking of, somewhere about 1780, this lordly dwelling of Vez was looked upon with different eyes, and, it must be confessed, it did not then offer so safe a place of retreat. It was a building of the twelfth or thirteenth century, rugged and gloomy, its terrifying exterior having assumed no kindlier aspect as the years rolled by. True, the sentinel with his measured tread and flashing steel-cap no longer paced its ramparts, the archer with his shrill-sounding horn no longer kept watch and ward on the battlements; true the postern was no longer guarded by trusty men at arms, ready at the least signal of danger to lower the portcullis and draw

up the bridge; but the solitude alone which surrounded this grim giant of granite was sufficient to inspire the feeling of awe-inspiring majesty awakened by all mute and motionless things.

The lord of this old fortress, however, was by no means so much to be dreaded; those who were more intimately acquainted with him than were the peasants, and could do him more justice, asserted that his bark was worse than his bite, and that he caused more fear than harm—that is, among his fellow Christians. With the animals of the forest it was different, for he was avowedly their mortal and implacable enemy.

He was chief wolf-hunter to his Royal Highness Louis Philippe of Orleans, the fourth of that name —a post which allowed him to gratify the inordinate passion he had for the chase. Although it was not easy, it was yet possible to bring the Baron to listen to reason in other matters; but as regards the chase, if once he had got a fixed idea in his head, nothing would satisfy him until he had carried it out and had achieved his purpose.

His wife, according to report, was the natural daughter of the Prince, which, in conjunction with his title of chief wolf-hunter, gave him almost absolute power throughout the domains of his illustrious father-in-law, a power which no one dared to contest with him, especially after the remarriage of his Royal Highness with Madame de Montesson. This had taken place in 1773, since which date he had almost abandoned his castle at Villers-Cotterets for his delightful residence at Bagnolet, where he entertained all the first wits of the day and amused himself with play-acting.

And so, whether the sun was shining to rejoice the earth, or the rain was saddening it, whether the winter fields lay hidden beneath a shroud of snow, or the spring had spread her fresh green carpet over the meadows, it was rare, on any day of the year, not to see the great gates of the Castle thrown wide open between eight and nine o'clock in the morning, and first the Baron come forth, and

immediately after him his chief pricker, Marcotte, followed by the other prickers. Then appeared the dogs, coupled and held in leash by the keepers of the hounds, under the superintendence of Engoulevent, who aspired to become a pricker. Even as the German executioner walks alone, behind the nobles and in front of the citizens, to show that he is the least of the former and the first of the latter, so he walked immediately after the prickers and ahead of the keepers of the hounds, as being the chief of the whippers-in and least of the prickers.

The whole procession filed out of the Castle court in full hunting array, with the English horses and the French hounds; twelve horses, and forty dogs.

Before we go any farther, let me say that with these twelve horses and forty dogs the Baron hunted every sort of quarry, but more especially the wolf, in order no doubt to do honour to his title.

No further proof will be needed by the genuine sportsman of the fine faith he had in the general quality of his hounds, and in their keenness of scent, than the fact that next to the wolf he gave preference to the boar, then to the red deer, then to the fallow-deer, and lastly to the roebuck; finally, if the keepers of the pack failed to sight the animal they had tracked, he uncoupled at random, and went after the first hare that crossed his path. For, as we have already stated, the worthy Baron went out hunting every day, and he would sooner have gone for four-and-twenty hours without food or drink, although he was often thirsty, than have spent that time without seeing his hounds run.

But, as everybody knows, however swift the horses, and however keen the dogs, hunting has its bad times as well as its good.

One day, Marcotte came up to where the Baron was awaiting him, with a crestfallen expression of countenance.

"How now, Marcotte," asked the Baron frown-

ing, "what is the matter this time? I see by your face we are to expect bad sport to-day."

Marcotte shook his head.

"Speak up, man," continued the Baron with a gesture of impatience.

"The matter is, my Lord, that the black wolf is about."

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed the Baron, his eyes sparkling; for you must know that this made the fifth or sixth time that the worthy Baron had started the animal in question, but never once had he been able to get within gun-shot of him or to run him down.

"Yes," Marcotte went on, "but the damned beast has employed himself so well all night crossing his track and doubling that after tracing him over half the forest, I found myself at the place from which I started."

"You think then, Marcotte, that there is no chance of getting near him."

"I am afraid not."

"By all the devils in hell!" exclaimed the Lord of Vez, who had not had his equal in swearing since the mighty Nimrod, "however, I am not feeling well to-day, and I must have a burst of some kind, to get rid of these bad humours. What do you think we can hunt, Marcotte, in place of this damned black wolf?"

"Well, having been so taken up with the wolf," answered Marcotte, "I have not traced any other animal. Will my Lord uncouple at random and hunt the first animal that we come across?"

The Baron was about to express his willingness to agree to this proposal when he caught sight of little Engoulevent coming towards them cap in hand.

"Wait a moment," he said, "here comes Engoulevent, who, I fancy, has some advice to give us."

"I have no advice to give to a noble Lord like yourself," replied Engoulevent, assuming an expression of humility on his sly and crafty face;

"it is, however, my duty to inform you that there is a splendid buck in the neighbourhood."

"Let us see your buck, Engoulevent," replied the chief wolf-hunter, "and if you are not mistaken about it, there will be a new crown for you."

"Where is this buck of yours?" asked Marcotte, "but look to your skin, if you make us uncouple to no purpose."

"Let me have Matador and Jupiter, and then we shall see." Matador and Jupiter were the finest among the hounds belonging to the Lord of Vez. And indeed, Engoulevent had not gone a hundred paces with them through the thicket, before, by the lashing of their tails, and their repeated yelping, he knew that they were on the right scent. In another minute or two a magnificent ten-tined stag came into view. Marcotte cried Tally-ho, sounded his horn, and the hunt began, to the great satisfaction of the Lord of Vez, who, although regretting the black wolf, was willing to make the best of a fine buck in its stead. The hunt had lasted two hours, and the quarry still held on. It had first led its pursuers from the little wood of Haramont to the Chemin du Pendu, and thence straight to the back of Oigny, and it still showed no sign of fatigue; for it was not one of those poor animals of the flat country who get their tails pulled by every wretched terrier.

As it neared the low grounds of Bourgfontaine, however, it evidently decided that it was being run rather hard, for it gave up the bolder measures which had hitherto enabled it tc keep ahead, and began to double.

Its first manœuvre was to go down to the brook which joins the ponds of Baisemont and Bourg, then to walk against stream with the water up to its haunches, for nearly half a mile; it then sprang on to the right bank, back again into the bed of the stream, made another leap to the left, and with a succession of bounds, as vigorous as its failing strength allowed, continued to out-distance its pursuers. But the dogs of my Lord Baron were

not animals to be put out by such trifles as these. Being both sagacious and well-bred, they, of their own accord, divided the task between themselves, half going up stream, and half down, these hunting on the right, those on the left, and so effectually that ere long they put the animal off its changes, for they soon recovered the scent, rallying at the first cry given by one of the pack, and starting afresh on the chase, as ready and eager as if the deer had been only twenty paces in front of them.

And so with galloping of horses, with cry of hounds and blare of horn, the Baron and his huntsmen reached the ponds of Saint Antoine, a hundred paces or so from the confines of Oigny. Between these and the Osier-beds stood the hut of Thibault, the sabot-maker.

We must pause to give some description of this Thibault, the shoemaker, the real hero of the tale.

You will ask why I, who have summoned kings to appear upon the stage, who have obliged princes, dukes, and barons to play secondary parts in my romances, should take a simple shoemaker for the hero of this tale.

First, I will reply by saying that, in my dear home country of Villers-Cotterets, there are more sabot-makers than barons, dukes and princes, and that, as soon as I decided to make the forest the scene of the events I am about to record, I was obliged to choose one of the actual inhabitants of this forest as hero, unless I had wished to represent such fantastic persons as the *Incas* of Marmontel or the *Abencerages* of M. de Florian.

More than that, it is not the author who decides on the subject, but the subject which takes possession of the author, and, good or bad, this particular subject has taken possession of me. I will therefore endeavour to draw Thibault's portrait for you, plain shoemaker as he was, as exactly as the artist paints the portrait which a prince desires to send to his lady-love.

Thibault was a man between twenty-five and twenty-seven years of age, tall, well made, physi-

cally robust, but by nature melancholy and sad of heart. This depression of spirits arose from a little grain of envy, which, in spite of himself, perhaps unconsciously to himself, he harboured towards all such of his neighbours as had been more favoured by fortune than himself.

His father had committed a fault, a serious one at all times, but more especially in those days of absolutism, when a man was not able to rise above his station as nowadays, when with sufficient capacity he may attain to any rank. Thibault had been educated above his position; he had been at school under the Abbé Fortier, at Villers-Cotterets, and had learnt to read, write, and cypher; moreover he knew a little Latin, which made him inordinately proud of himself. Thibault had spent a great part of his time in reading, and his books had been chiefly those which were in vogue at the close of the last century. But he had not been a sufficiently clever analyst to know how to separate the good from the bad, or rather he *had* separated what was bad, and swallowed it in large doses, leaving the good to precipitate itself at the bottom of the glass.

At twenty years of age Thibault had certainly had dreams of being something other than a sabot-maker. He had, for instance, for a very little while, cast his eyes towards the army. But his comrades who had worn the double livery of king and country had left the service as they entered it, mere soldiers of the ranks, having failed during five or six years of slavery to obtain promotion, even to the not very exalted grade of corporal.

Thibault had also thought of becoming a sailor. But a career in the navy was as much forbidden to the plebeian as one in the army. Possibly after enduring danger and storm and battle for fifteen or twenty years, he might be made a boatswain's mate, that was all, and then! besides, it was by no means Thibault's ambition to wear a short vest and sail-cloth trousers, but the blue uniform of the king with red vest and gold epaulettes. He had

moreover known of no single case in which the son of a mere shoe-maker had become Master of a Frigate, or even Lieutenant. So he was forced to give up all idea of joining the King's Navy.

Thibault would not have minded being a Notary, and at one time thought of apprenticing himself to the Royal Scrivener, Maître Niquet, as a stepping-stone, and of making his way up on the strength of his own legs and with the help of his pen. But supposing him to have risen to the position of head clerk with a salary of a hundred crowns, where was he to find the thirty thousand francs which would be required for the purchase of the smallest village practice.

There was, therefore, no better chance of his becoming a scrivener than of becoming an officer on sea or land. Meanwhile, Thibault's father died, leaving very little ready money. There was about enough to bury him, so he was buried, and this done, there remained some thirty or forty francs over for Thibault.

Thibault knew his trade well; indeed, he was a first-rate workman; but he had no inclination to handle either auger or parer. It ended, therefore, by his leaving all his father's tools in the care of a friend, a remnant of prudence still remaining to him, and selling every vestige of furniture; having thus realised a sum of five hundred and forty livres, he determined to make what was then called the tour of France.

Thibault spent three years in travelling; he did not make his fortune during that time, but he learnt a great many things in the course of his journey of which he was previously ignorant, and acquired certain accomplishments which he had previously been without.

He learned amongst other things that, although it was as well to keep one's word on matters of business with a man, it was no use whatever keeping love vows made to a woman.

So much for his character and habits of mind. As to his external accomplishments, he could dance

a jig beautifully, could hold his own at quarter-staff against four men, and could handle the boar-spear as cleverly as the best huntsman going. All these things had not a little served to increase Thibault's natural self-esteem, and, seeing himself handsomer, stronger, and cleverer than many of the nobles, he would exclaim against Providence, crying, "Why was I not nobly born? why was not that nobleman yonder born a peasant?"

But as Providence took care not to make any answer to these apostrophés, and as Thibault found that dancing, playing at quarter-staff, and throwing the boar-spear only fatigued the body, without procuring him any material advantage, he began to turn his thoughts towards his ancient trade, humble though it was, saying to himself, if it enabled the father to live, it would also enable the son. So Thibault went and fetched away his tools; and then, tools in hand, he went to ask permission of the Steward of his Royal Highness Louis Philippe of Orleans, to build a hut in the forest, in which to carry on his trade. He had no difficulty in obtaining this, for the steward knew by experience that his master was a very kind-hearted man, expending as much as two hundred and forty thousand francs a year on the poor; he felt sure, therefore, that one who gave away a sum like this, would be willing to let an honest workman who wished to ply his trade have thirty or forty feet of ground.

As he had leave to establish himself in whatever part of the forest he liked best, Thibault chose the spot near the Osier-beds, where the roads crossed, one of the most beautiful parts of the woods, less than a mile from Oigny and about three times that distance from Villers-Cotterets. The shoemaker put up his work-shop, built partly of old planks given him by M. Panisis, who had been having a sale in the neighbourhood, and partly of the branches which the steward gave him leave to cut in the forest.

When the building of the hut, which consisted of a bedroom, cosily shut in, where he could work

during the winter, and of a lean-to, open to the air, where he could work in the summer, was completed, Thibault began to think of making himself a bed. At first, a layer of fern had to serve for this purpose; but after he had made a hundred pairs of wooden shoes and had sold these to Bedeau, who kept a general shop at Villers-Cotterets, he was able to pay a sufficient deposit to get a mattress, to be paid for in full by the end of three months. The framework of the bed was not difficult to make; Thibault was not the shoemaker he was without being a bit of a carpenter into the bargain, and when this was finished he plaited osiers to take the place of sacking, laid the mattress upon them, and found himself at last with a bed to lie upon.

Little by little came the sheets, and then in their turn the coverlids; the next purchase was a chafing-dish, and earthenware pots to cook in, and finally some plates and dishes. Before the year was out Thibault had also made additions to his furniture of a fine oak chest and a fine walnut-wood cupboard, both, like the bed, his own handiwork. All the while he was driving a brisk trade, for none could beat Thibault in turning a block of beech into a pair of shoes, and in converting the odd chips into spoons, salt-cellers and natty little bowls.

He had now been settled in his work-shop for three years, that is, ever since his return after the completion of his tour round France, and there was nothing for which anyone could have reproached him during this interval except the failing we have already mentioned—that he was rather more envious of the good fortune of his neighbour than was altogether conducive to the welfare of his soul. But this feeling was as yet so inoffensive that his confessor had no need to do more than awaken in him a sense of shame for harbouring thoughts which had, so far, not resulted in any active crime.

CHAPTER II

SEIGNEUR AND SABOT-MAKER

AS already said, the buck began to dodge and double on reaching Oigny, turning and twisting round Thibault's hut, and the weather being fine although the autumn was well advanced, the shoe-maker was sitting at his work in his open lean-to. Looking up, he suddenly espied the trembling animal, quivering in every limb, standing a few paces in front of him, gazing at him with intelligent and terrified eyes.

Thibault had been for a long time aware that the hunt was circling around Oigny, at one time drawing near to the village, and then receding, only to draw near again.

There was nothing therefore very surprising to him in the sight of the buck, yet he stayed his hand, although he was busy at work, and contemplated the animal.

"Saint Sabot!" he exclaimed—I should explain, that the festival of Saint Sabot is the wooden-shoe fête—"Saint Sabot! but that is a dainty morsel and would taste as fine, I warrant, as the chamois I ate at Vienne once at the grand banquet of the Jolly Shoe-makers of Dauphiné. Lucky folk who can dine on the like every day. I tasted such once, it is now nearly four years ago, and my mouth waters now when I think of it. Oh! these lords! these lords! with their fresh meats and their old wines at every meal, while I have to be satisfied with potatoes to eat and water to drink from one week's end to the other; and it is a chance if even on a Sunday I can feast myself with a lump of rusty

bacon and an old cabbage, and a glass of *pignolet* fit to make my old goat stand on her head.

It need scarcely be said, that as soon as Thibault began this monologue, the buck had turned and disappeared. Thibault had finished rounding his periods, and had just declaimed his peroration, when he heard himself roughly accosted in forcible terms:

"Ho, there, you scoundrel! answer me."

It was the Baron, who seeing his dogs wavering, was anxious to make sure they were not on the wrong scent.

"Ho, there, you scoundrel!" repeated the wolf-hunter, "have you seen the beast?"

There was evidently something in the manner of the Baron's questioning which did not please our philosophical shoemaker, for although he was perfectly aware what was the matter, he answered: "what beast?"

"Curse you! why, the buck we are hunting! He must have passed close by here, and standing gaping as you do, you must have seen him. It was a fine stag of ten, was it not? Which way did he go? Speak up, you blackguard, or you shall have a taste of my stirrup-leather!"

"The black plague take him, cub of a wolf!" muttered the shoemaker to himself.

Then, aloud, with a fine air of pretended simplicity, "Ah, yes!" he said, "I did see him."

"A buck, was it not? a ten-tiner, eh? with great horns."

"Ah, yes to be sure, a buck, with great horns—or great corns, was it? yes, I saw him as plain as I see you, my Lord. But there, I can't say if he had any corns, for I did not look at his feet, anyhow," he added, with the air of a perfect simpleton, "if he had corns, they did not prevent him running."

At any other time the Baron would have laughed at what he might have taken for genuine stupidity; but the doublings of the animal were beginning to put him into a regular huntsman's fever.

"Now, then, you scoundrel, a truce to this

jesting! If you are in a humour for jokes, it is more than I am!"

"I will be in whatever humour it may please your Lordship I should be."

"Well, then, answer me."

"Your Lordship has asked me nothing as yet."

"Did the deer seem tired?"

"Not very."

"Which way did he come?"

"He did not come, he was standing still."

"Well, but he must have come from one side or the other."

"Ah! very likely, but I did not see him come."

"Which way did he go?"

"I would tell you directly; only I did not see him go."

The Lord of Vez cast an angry look at Thibault.

"Is it some while ago the buck passed this way, Master Simpleton?"

"Not so very long, my Lord."

"About how long ago?"

Thibault made as if trying to remember; at last he replied:

"It was, I think, the day before yesterday," but in saying this, the shoemaker, unfortunately, could not suppress a grin. This grin did not escape the Baron, who, spurring his horse, rode down on Thibault with lifted whip.

Thibault was agile, and with a single bound he reached the shelter of his lean-to, whither the wolf-hunter could not follow, as long as he remained mounted; Thibault was therefore in momentary safety.

"You are only bantering and lying!" cried the huntsman, "for there is Marcassino, my best hound, giving cry not twenty yards off, and if the deer passed by where Marcassino is, he must have come over the hedge, and it is impossible, therefore, that you did not see him."

"Pardon, my Lord, but according to our good priest, no one but the Pope is infallible, and Monsieur Marcassino may be mistaken."

"Marcassino is never mistaken, do you hear you rascal! and in proof of it I can see from here the marks where the animal scratched up the ground."

"Nevertheless, my Lord, I assure you, I swear . . ." said Thibault, who saw the Baron's eyebrows contracting in a way that made him feel uneasy.

"Silence, and come here, blackguard!" cried my Lord.

Thibault hesitated a moment, but the black look on the sportsman's face became more and more threatening, and fearing to increase his exasperation by disobeying his command, he thought he had better go forward, hoping that the Baron merely wished to ask a service of him.

But it was an unlucky move on his part, for scarcely had he emerged from the protection of the shed before the horse of the Lord of Vez, urged by bit and spur, gave a leap, which brought his rider swooping down upon Thibault, while at the same moment a furious blow from the butt end of the Baron's whip fell upon his head.

The shoemaker, stunned by the blow, tottered a moment, lost his balance and was about to fall face downwards, when the Baron, drawing his foot out of the stirrup, with a violent kick in the chest, not only straightened him again, but sent the poor wretch flying in an opposite direction, where he fell with his back against the door of his hut.

"Take that," said the Baron, as he first felled Thibault with his whip, and then kicked him, "take that for your lie, and that for your banter!"

And then, without troubling himself any further about the man, whom he left lying on his back, the Lord of Vez, seeing that the hounds had rallied on hearing Marcassino's cry, gave them a cheery note on his horn, and cantered away.

Thibault lifted himself up, feeling bruised all over, and began feeling himself from head to foot to make sure that no bones were broken.

Having carefully passed his hand over each limb

in succession, "that's all right," he said, "there is nothing broken either above or below, I am glad to find. So, my Lord Baron, that is how you treat people, because you happen to have married a Prince's bastard daughter! But let me tell you, my fine fellow, it is not you who will eat the buck you are hunting to-day; it will be this blackguard, this scoundrel, this simpleton of a Thibault who will eat it. Yes, it shall be I who eat it, that I vow!" cried Thibault, confirming himself more and more in his bold resolution, and it is no use being a man if, having once made a vow, one fails to keep it.

So without further delay, Thibault thrust his bill-hook into his belt, seized his boar-spear, and after listening for a moment to the cry of the hounds to ascertain in which direction the hunt had gone, he ran off with all the speed of which a man's legs are capable to get the start of them, guessing by the curve which the stag and its pursuers were following what would be the straight line to take so as to intercept them.

There were two ways of doing his deed open to Thibault; either to hide himself beside the path which the buck must take and kill him with his boar-spear, or else to surprise the animal just as he was being hunted down by the dogs, and collar him there and then.

And as he ran, the desire to revenge himself on the Baron for the latter's brutality, was not so uppermost in Thibault's mind as the thoughts of the sumptuous manner in which he would fare for the next month, on the shoulders, the back, and the haunches of the deer, either salted to a turn, roasted on the spit, or cut in slices and done in the pan. And these two ideas, moreover, of vengeance and gluttony, were so jumbled up in his brain that while still running at the top of his speed he laughed in his sleeve, as he pictured the dejected mien of the Baron and his men returning to the Castle after their fruitless day's hunt, and at the same time saw himself seated at table, the door securely fastened,

and a pint of wine beside him, tête-à-tête with haunch of the deer, the rich and delicious grav escaping as the knife returned for a third or fourt cut.

The deer, as far as Thibault could calculate, wa making for the bridge which crosses the Ourcq between Noroy and Troesne. At the time of whic we are now speaking there was a bridge spannin the river, formed of two joists and a few planks As the river was very high and very rapid, Thibaul decided that the deer would not attempt to ford it so he hid himself behind a rock, within reach o the bridge, and waited.

It was not long before he saw the graceful hea of the deer appear above the rock at some ten paces distance; the animal was bending its ears to the wind in the endeavour to catch the sound of the enemy' approach as it was borne along the breeze. Thi bault, excited by this sudden appearance, rose fron behind the rock, poised his boar-spear and sent i flying towards the animal.

The buck, with a single bound, reached the middl of the bridge, a second carried him on to th opposite bank, and a third bore him out of sight.

The boar-spear had passed within a foot of th animal, and had buried itself in the grass fifteer paces from where Thibault was standing. Neve before had he been known to make such an unskilfu throw—he, Thibault, of all the company who mad the tour of France, the one known to be surest o his aim! Enraged with himself, therefore, h picked up his weapon, and bounded across the bridg with an agility equal to that of the deer.

Thibault knew the country quite as well as th animal he was pursuing, and so got ahead of th deer and once more concealed himself, this tim behind a beech-tree, half-way up, and not too fa from a little footpath.

The deer now passed so close to him, tha Thibault hesitated as to whether it would not b better to knock the animal down with his boar-spea than to throw the weapon at it; but his hesitation

did not last longer than a flash of lightning, for no lightning could be quicker than the animal itself, which was already twenty paces off when Thibault threw his boar-spear, but without better luck than the time before.

And now the baying of the hounds was drawing nearer and nearer; another few minutes, and it would, he felt, be impossible for him to carry out his design. But in honour to his spirit of persistence, be it said, that in proportion as the difficulty increased, the greater became Thibault's desire to get possession of the deer.

"I must have it, come what will," he cried, "I must! and if there is a God who cares for the poor, I shall have satisfaction of this confounded Baron, who beat me as if I were a dog, but I am a man notwithstanding, and I am quite ready to prove the same to him." And Thibault picked up his boar-spear and once more set off running. But it would appear that the good God whom he had just invoked, either had not heard him, or wished to drive him to extremities, for his third attempt had no greater success than the previous ones.

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Thibault, "God Almighty is assuredly deaf, it seems. Let the Devil then open his ears and hear me! In the name of God or of the Devil, I want you and I will have you, cursed animal!"

Thibault had hardly finished this double blasphemy when the buck, doubling back, passed close to him for the fourth time, and disappeared among the bushes, but so quickly and unexpectedly, that Thibault had not even time to lift his boar-spear.

At that moment he heard the dogs so near him that he deemed it would be imprudent to continue his pursuit. He looked round him, saw a thickly-leaved oak tree, threw his boar-spear into a bush, swarmed up the trunk, and hid himself among the foliage. He imagined, and with good reason, that since the deer had gone ahead again, the hunt would only pass by following on its track. The dogs had not lost the scent, in spite of the quarry's doublings,

and they were not likely to lose it now. Thibault had not been seated among the branches for above five minutes, when first the hounds came into sight then the Baron, who in spite of his fifty-five years headed the chase as if he had been a man of twenty It must be added that the Lord of Vez was in a state of rage that we will not even endeavour to describe.

To lose four hours over a wretched deer and still to be running behind it! Such a thing had never happened to him before.

He stormed at his men, he whipped his dogs, and had so ploughed his horse's sides with his spurs, that the thick coating of mud which covered his gaiters was reddened with blood.

On reaching the bridge over the Ourcq, however, there had been an interval of alleviation for the Baron, for the hounds had so unanimously taken up the scent, that the cloak which the wolf-hunter carried behind him would have sufficed to cover the whole pack as they crossed the bridge.

Indeed the Baron was so pleased, that he was not satisfied with humming a tirra-la, but, unslinging his hunting-horn he sounded it with his full lung-power, a thing which he only did on great occasions.

But, unfortunately, the joy of my Lord of Vez was destined to be short lived.

All of a sudden, just as the hounds, that were crying in concert in a way which more and more delighted the Baron's ears, were passing under the tree where Thibault was perched, the whole pack came to a standstill, and every tongue was silenced as by enchantment. Marcotte, at his master's command, dismounted to see if he could find any traces of the deer, the whippers-in ran up, and they and Marcotte looked about, but they could find nothing.

Then Engoulevent, who had set his heart on a view-halloo being sounded for the animal he had tracked down, joined the others, and he too began to search. Everyone was searching, calling out and trying to rouse the dogs, when above all the other

voices, was heard, like the blast of a tempest, the voice of the Baron.

"Ten thousand devils!" he thundered. "Have the dogs fallen into a pit-hole, Marcotte?"

"No, my Lord, they are here, but they are come to a check."

"How! come to a standstill!" exclaimed the Baron.

"What is to be done, my Lord? I cannot understand what has happened, but such is the fact."

"Come to a check!" again exclaimed the Baron, "come to a standstill, here, in the middle of the forest, here where there is no stream where the animal could have doubled, or rock for it to climb. You must be out of your mind, Marcotte!"

"I, out of my mind, my Lord?"

"Yes, you, you fool, as truly as your dogs are all worthless trash!"

As a rule, Marcotte bore with admirable patience the insults which the Baron was in the habit of lavishing upon everybody about him at critical moments of the chase, but this word *trash*, applied to his dogs, was more than his habitual long-suffering could bear, and drawing himself up to his full height, he answered vehemently, "Trash, my Lord? my dogs worthless trash! dogs that have brought down an old wolf after such a furious run that the best horse in your stable was foundered! my dogs trash!"

"Yes, trash, worthless trash, I say it again, Marcotte. Only trash would stop at a check like that, after hunting one wretched buck so many hours on end."

"My Lord," answered Marcotte, in a tone of mingled dignity and sorrow, "My Lord, say that it is my fault, call me a fool, a blockhead, a scoundrel, a blackguard, an idiot; insult me in my own person, or in that of my wife, of my children, and it is nothing to me; but for the sake of all my past services to you, do not attack me in my office of chief pricker, do not insult your dogs."

"How do you account for their silence, then? tell

me that! How do you account for it? I am quite willing to hear what you have to say, and I am listening."

"I cannot explain it any more than you can, my Lord; the dammed animal must have flown into the clouds or disappeared in the bowels of the earth."

"What nonsense are you talking!" exclaimed the Baron—"do you want to make out that the deer has burrowed like a rabbit, or risen from the ground like a grouse?"

"My Lord, I mean it only as a manner of speech. What is a truth, what is the fact, is that there is some witchcraft behind all this. As sure as it is now daylight, my dogs, every one of them, lay down at the same moment, suddenly, without an instant's hesitation. Ask anybody who was near them at the time. And now they are not even trying to recover the scent, but there they lie flat on the ground like so many stags in their lair. I ask you, is it natural?"

"Thrash them, man! thrash them, then," cried the Baron, "flay the skin off their backs; there is nothing like it for driving out the evil spirit."

And the Baron was going forward to emphasise with a few blows from his own whip the exorcisms which Marcotte, according to his orders, was distributing among the poor beasts, when Engoulevent, hat in hand, drew near to the Baron and timidly laid his hand on the horse's bridle.

"My Lord," said the keeper of the kennel, "I think I have just discovered a cuckoo in that tree who may perhaps be able to give us some explanation of what has happened."

"What the devil are you talking about, with your cuckoo, you ape?" said the Baron. "If you wait a moment, you scamp, I will teach you how to come chaffing your master like that!"

And the Baron lifted his whip. But with all the heroism of a Spartan, Engoulevent lifted his arm above his head as a shield and continued:

"Strike, if you will, my Lord, but after that look up into this tree, and when your Lordship has seen

the bird that is perched among the branches, I think you will be more ready to give me a crown than a blow."

And the good man pointed to the oak tree in which Thibault had taken refuge on hearing the huntsmen approach. He had climbed up from branch to branch and had finally hoisted himself on to the topmost one.

The Baron shaded his eyes with his hand, and, looking up, caught sight of Thibault.

"Well, here's something mighty queer!" he cried. "It seems that in the forest of Villers-Cotterets the deer burrow like foxes, and men perch on trees like crows. However," continued the worthy Baron, "we will see what sort of creature we have to deal with." And putting his hand to his mouth, he halloed:

"Ho, there, my friend! would it be particularly disagreeable for you to give me ten minutes' conversation?"

But Thibault maintained the most profound silence.

"My Lord," said Engoulevent, "if you like . . ." and he made a sign to show that he was ready to climb the tree.

"No, no," said the Baron, at the same time putting out his hand to hold him back.

"Ho, there, my friend!" repeated the Baron still without recognising Thibault, "will it please you to answer me, yes or no."

He paused a second.

"I see, it is evidently, no; you pretend to be deaf, my friend; wait a moment, and I will get my speaking-trumpet," and he held out his hand to Marcotte, who, guessing his intention, handed him his gun.

Thibault, who wished to put the huntsmen on the wrong scent, was meanwhile pretending to cut away the dead branches, and he put so much energy into this feigned occupation that he did not perceive the movement on the part of the Baron, or, if he saw, only took it as a menace, without attaching the importance to it which it merited.

The wolf-hunter waited for a little while to se if the answer would come, but as it did not, h pulled the trigger; the gun went off, and a branc was heard to crack.

The branch which cracked was the one on whic Thibault was poised; the Baron was a fine shot an had broken it just between the trunk and the shoe maker's foot.

Deprived of his support, Thibault fell, rolling fror branch to branch. Fortunately the tree was thick and the branches strong, so that his fall was broke and less rapid than it might have been, and h finally reached the ground, after many rebounds without further ill consequences than a feeling o great fear and a few slight bruises on that part o his body which had first come in contact with th earth.

"By Beelzebub's horns!" exclaimed the Baron delighted with own skill, "if it is not my joker o the morning! Ah! so, you scamp, did the discours you had with my whip seem too short to you, tha you are so anxious to take it up again where w left off?"

"Oh, as to that, I assure you it is not so, m Lord," answered Thibault in a tone of the mos perfect sincerity.

"So much the better for your skin, my goo fellow. Well, and now tell me what you were doin up there, perched on the top of that oak-tree?"

"My Lord can see himself," answered Thibault pointing to a few dry twigs lying here and ther on the ground, "I was cutting a little dry woo for fuel."

"Ah! I see. Now then, my good fellow, yo will please tell us, without any beating about th bush, what has become of our deer."

"By the devil, he ought to know, seeing tha he has been perched up there so as not to los any of its movements," put in Marcotte.

"But I swear, my Lord," said Thibault, "tha I don't know what it is you mean about this wretche buck."

"Ah, I thought so," cried Marcotte, delighted to divert his master's ill-humour from himself, "he has not seen it, he has not seen the animal at all, he does not know what we mean by this wretched buck! But look here, my Lord, see, the marks on these leaves where the animal has bitten; it was just here that the dogs came to a full stop, and now, although the ground is good to show every mark, we can find no trace of the animal, for ten, twenty, or a hundred paces even?"

"You hear?" said the Baron, joining his words on to those of the pricker, "you were up there, and the deer here at your feet. It did not go by like a mouse without making any sound, and you did not see or hear. You must needs have seen or heard it!"

"He has killed the deer," said Marcotte, "and hidden it away in a bush, that's as clear as the day."

"Oh, my Lord," cried Thibault, who knew better than anybody else how mistaken the pricker was in making this accusation, "My Lord, by all the saints in paradise, I swear to you that I have not killed your deer; I swear it to you on the salvation of my soul, and, may I perish on the spot if I have given him even the slightest scratch. And besides, I could not have killed him without wounding him, and if I had wounded him, blood would have flowed; look, I pray you, sir," continued Thibault turning to the pricker, "and God be thanked, you will find no trace of blood. I, kill a poor beast! and, my God, with what? Where is my weapon? God knows I have no other weapon than this bill-hook. Look yourself, my Lord."

But unfortunately for Thibault, he had hardly uttered these words, before Maître Engoulevent, who had been prowling about for some minutes past, re-appeared, carrying the boar-spear which Thibault had thrown into one of the bushes before climbing up the tree.

He handed the weapon to the Baron.

There was no doubt about it—Engoulevent was Thibault's evil genius.

CHAPTER III

AGNELETTE

THE Baron took the weapon which Engoulever handed him, and carefully and deliberatel examined the boar-spear from point to handl without saying a word. On the handle had bee carved a little wooden shoe, which had served a Thibault's device while making the tour of France as thereby he was able to recognise his ow weapon. The Baron now pointed to this, saying t Thibault as he did so:

"Ah, ah, Master Simpleton! there is somethin which witnesses terribly against you! I mus confess this boar-spear smells to me uncommonly c venison, by the devil it does! However, all I hav now to say to you is this: You have bee poaching, which is a serious crime; you have pe jured yourself, which is a great sin; I am going t enforce expiation from you, for the one and for th other, to help towards the salvation of that soul b which you have sworn."

Whereupon turning to the pricker, he continued "Marcotte, strip off that rascal's vest and shir and tie him up to a tree with a couple of the do leashes—and then give him thirty-six strokes acros the back with your shoulder belt, a dozen for hi perjury, and two dozen for his poaching; no, made a mistake, a dozen for poaching and tw dozen for perjuring himself, God's portion must b the largest."

This order caused great rejoicing among th menials, who thought it good luck to have

:ulprit on whom they could avenge themselves for he mishaps of the day.

In spite of Thibault's protestations, who swore ›y all the saints in the calendar that he had killed ıeither buck nor doe, neither goat nor kidling, he vas divested of his garments and firmly strapped to he trunk of a tree; then the execution commenced.

The pricker's strokes were so heavy that Thibault, vho had sworn not to utter a sound, and bit his ips to enable himself to keep his resolution, was orced at the third blow to open his mouth and cry ›ut.

The Baron, as we have already seen, was about he roughest man of his class for a good thirty miles ound, but he was not hard-hearted, and it was a istress to him to listen to the cries of the culprit s they became more and more frequent. As, however, the poachers on His Highness's estate had of ıte grown bolder and more troublesome, he decided hat he had better let the sentence be carried out to he full, but he turned his horse with the intention f riding away, determined no longer to remain as spectator.

As he was on the point of doing this, a young irl suddenly emerged from the underwood, threw erself on her knees beside the horse, and lifting er large beautiful eyes, all wet with tears, to the Baron, cried:

"In the name of the God of mercy, my Lord, ave pity on that man!"

The Lord of Vez looked down at the young girl. he was indeed a lovely child; hardly sixteen years f age, of a slender and exquisite figure, with a ink and white complexion, large blue eyes, soft nd tender in expression, and a crown of fair hair, hich fell in luxuriant waves over neck and houlders, escaping from underneath the shabby ttle grey linen cap, which endeavoured in vain › imprison them.

All this the Baron took in with a glance, in spite f the humble clothing of the beautiful suppliant, nd as he had no dislike to a pretty face, he smiled

down on the charming young peasant girl, i response to the pleading of her eloquent eyes.

But, as he looked without speaking, and all th while the blows were still falling, she cried again with a voice and gesture of even more earnes supplication.

"Have pity, in the name of Heaven, my Lord Tell your servants to let the poor man go, his crie pierce my heart."

"Ten thousand fiends!" cried the Grand Master "you take a great interest in that rascal over there my pretty child. Is he your brother?"

"No, my Lord."

"Your cousin?"

"No, my Lord."

"Your lover?"

"My lover! My Lord is laughing at me."

"Why not? If it were so, my sweet girl, I mus confess I should envy him his lot."

The girl lowered her eyes.

"I do not know him, my Lord, and have neve seen him before to-day."

"Without counting that now she only sees hir wrong side before," Engoulevent ventured to pu in, thinking that it was a suitable moment for little pleasantry.

"Silence, sirrah!" said the Baron sternly. Ther once more turning to the girl with a smile.

"Really!" he said. "Well, if he is neither relation nor a lover, I should like to see how fa your love for your neighbour will let you go. Come a bargain, pretty girl!"

"How, my Lord?"

"Grace for that scoundrel in return for a kiss.

"Oh! with all my heart!" cried the young gir "Save the life of a man with a kiss! I am sur that our good *Curé* himself would say there wa no sin in that."

And without waiting for the Baron to stoop an take himself what he had asked for, she threw o her wooden-shoe, placed her dainty foot on the ti of the wolf-hunter's boot, and taking hold of th

horse's mane, lifted herself up with a spring to the evel of the face of the hardy huntsman, and there f her own accord offered him her round cheek, resh and velvety as the down of an August peach.

The Lord of Vez had bargained for one kiss, ut he took two; then, true to his sworn word, he nade a sign to Marcotte to stay the execution.

Marcotte was religiously counting his strokes; he twelfth was about to descend when he received he order to stop, and he did not think it expedient o stay it from falling. It is possible that he also hought it would be as well to give it the weight f two ordinary blows, so as to make up good neasure and give a thirteenth in; however that nay be, it is certain that it furrowed Thibault's houlders more cruelly than those that went before. t must be added, however, that he was unbound mmediately after.

Meanwhile the Baron was conversing with the oung girl.

"What is your name, my pretty one?"

"Georgine Agnelette, my Lord, my mother's ame! but the country people are content to call ne simply Agnelette."

"Ah, that's an unlucky name, my child," said he Baron.

"In what way, my Lord?" asked the girl.

"Because it makes you a prey for the wolf, my eauty. And from what part of the country do you ome, Agnelette?"

"From Préciamont, my Lord."

"And you come alone like this into the forest, ny child? that's brave for a lambkin."

"I am obliged to do it, my Lord, for my mother nd I have three goats to feed."

"So you come here to get grass for them?"

"Yes, my Lord."

"And are you not afraid, young and pretty as ou are?"

"Sometimes, my Lord, I cannot help trembling."

"And why do you tremble?"

"Well, my Lord, I hear so many tales, during

the winter evenings, about were-wolves, that whe I find myself all alone among the trees, and can hea no sound but the west wind, and the branche creaking as it blows through them, I feel a kin of shiver run through me, and my hair seems t stand on end; but when I hear your hunting hor and the dogs crying, then I feel at once quite saf again."

The Baron was pleased beyond measure with thi reply of the girl's, and stroking his beard com plaisantly, he said:

"Well, we give Master Wolf a pretty rough tim of it; but, there is a way, my pretty one, whereb you may spare yourself all these fears an tremblings."

"And how, my Lord?"

"Come in future to the Castle of Vez; no were wolf, or any other kind of wolf, has ever crosse the moat there, except when slung by a cord o to a hazel-pole."

Agnelette shook her head.

"You would not lik: to come? and why not?"

"Because I should find something worse ther than the wolf."

On hearing this. the Baron broke into a heart fit of laughter, and, seeing their Master laugh, al the huntsmen followed suit and joined in the chorus The fact was, that the sight of Agnelette ha entirely restored the good humour of the Lord o Vez. and he would, no doubt, have continued fo some time laughing and talking with Agnelette, i Marcotte, who had been recalling the dogs, an coupling them, had not respectfully reminded m Lord that they had some distance to go on thei way back to the Castle. The Baron made a playfu gesture of menace with his finger to the girl, an rode off followed by his train.

Agnelette was left alone with Thibault. We hav related what Agnelette had done for Thibault' sake, and also said that she was pretty.

Nevertheless, for all that, Thibault's firs thoughts on finding himself alone with the girl

were not for the one who had saved his life, but were given up to hatred and the contemplation of vengeance.

Thibault, as you see, had, since the morning, been making rapid strides along the path of evil.

"Ah! if the devil will but hear my prayer this time," he cried, as he shook his fist, cursing the while, after the retiring huntsmen, who were just out of view, "if the devil will but hear me, you shall be paid back with usury for all you have made me suffer this day, that I swear."

"Oh, how wicked it is of you to behave like that!" said Agnelette, going up to him. "The Baron is a kind Lord, very good to the poor, and always gently behaved with women."

"Quite so, and you shall see with what gratitude I will repay him for the blows he has given me."

"Come now, frankly, friend, confess that you deserved those blows," said the girl, laughing.

"So, so!" answered Thibault, "the Baron's kiss has turned your head, has it, my pretty Agnelette?"

"You, I should have thought, would have been the last person to reproach me with that kiss, Monsieur Thibault. But what I have said, I say again; my Lord Baron was within his rights."

"What, in belabouring me with blows!"

"Well, why do you go hunting on the estates of these great lords?"

"Does not the game belong to everybody, to the peasant just as much as to the great lords?"

"No, certainly not; the game is in their woods, it is fed on their grass, and you have no right to throw your boar-spear at a buck which belongs to my lord the Duke of Orleans."

"And who told you that I threw a boar-spear at this buck?" replied Thibault, advancing towards Agnelette in an almost threatening manner.

"Who told me? why, my own eyes, which, let me tell you, do not lie. Yes, I saw you throw your boar-spear, when you were hidden there, behind the beech-tree."

Thibault's anger subsided at once before th straightforward attitude of the girl, whose truth fulness was in such contrast to his falsehood.

"Well, after all," he said, "supposing a poc devil does once in a way help himself to a goo dinner from the superabundance of some great lord Are you of the same mind, Mademoiselle Agnelette as the judges who say that a man ought to be hange just for a wretched rabbit? Come now, do yo think God created that buck for the Baron mor than for me?"

"God, Monsieur Thibault, has told us not t covet other men's goods; obey the law of Goc and you will not find yourself any the worse o for it!"

"Ah, I see, my pretty Agnelette, you know m then, since you call me so glibly by my name?"

"Certainly I do; I remember seeing you a Boursonnes, on the day of the fête; they calle you the beautiful dancer, and stood round in a circl to watch you."

Thibault, pleased with this compliment, was no quite disarmed.

"Yes, yes, of course," he answered, "I remem ber now having seen you; and I think we dance together, did we not? but you were not so ta then as you are now, that's why I did not recognis you at first, but I recall you distinctly now. An I remember too that you wore a pink frock, wit a pretty little white bodice, and that we danced i the dairy. I wanted to kiss you, but you would nc let me, for you said that it was only proper to kis one's vis-á-vis, and not one's partner."

"You have a good memory, Monsieur Thibault!

"And do you know, Agnelette, that during thes last twelve months, for it is a year since that dance you have not only grown taller, but grown prettie too; I see you are one of those people who unde stand how to do two things at once."

The girl blushed and lowered her eyes, and th blush and the shy embarrassment only made he look more charming still.

Thibault's eyes were now turned towards her with more marked attention than before, and, in a voice, not wholly free from a slight agitation, he asked:

"Have you a lover, Agnelette?"

"No, Monsieur Thibault," she answered, "I have never had one, and do not wish to have one."

"And why is that? Is Cupid such a bad lad that you are afraid of him?"

"No, not that, but a lover is not at all what I want."

"And what do you want?"

"A husband."

Thibault made a movement, which Agnelette either did not, or pretended not to see.

"Yes," she repeated, "a husband. Grandmother is old and infirm, and a lover would distract my attention too much from the care which I now give her; whereas, a husband, if I found a nice fellow who would like to marry me—a husband would help me to look after her in her old age, and would share with me the task which God has laid upon me, of making her happy and comfortable in her last years."

"But do you think your husband," said Thibault, would be willing that you should love your grandmother more than you loved him? and do you not think he might be jealous at seeing you lavish so much tenderness upon her?"

"Oh," replied Agnelette, with an adorable smile, there is no fear of that, for I will manage so as to let him have such a large share of my love and attention that he will have no cause to complain; the kinder and the more patient he is for the dear old thing, the more I shall devote myself to him, the harder shall I work that there may be nothing wanting to our little household. You see me looking small and delicate, and you doubt that I should have strength for this; but I have plenty of spirit and energy for work, and then, when the heart serves consent, one can work day and night without

fatigue. Oh! how I should love the man who love my grandmother! I promise you, that she, an my husband, and I, we should be three happy folk together."

"You mean that you would be three very poo folks together, Agnelette!"

"And do you think the loves and friendships o the rich are worth a farthing more than those c the poor? At times, when I have been loving an caressing my grandmother, Monsieur Thibault, an she takes me on her lap and clasps me in her poo weak trembling arms, and puts her dear old wrinkle face against mine, and I feel my cheek wet with th loving tears she sheds, I begin to cry myself, and I tell you, Monsieur Thibault, so soft and swee are my tears, that there is no woman or girl, b she queen or princess, who has ever, I am sure, ever in her happiest days, known such a real joy as mine And, yet, there is no one in all the country rounc who is so destitute as we two are."

Thibault listened to what Agnelette was saying without answering; his mind was occupied with many thoughts, such thoughts as are indulged in by the ambitious; but his dreams of ambition were disturbed at moments by a passing sensation of depression and disillusionment.

He, the man who had spent hours at a time watching the beautiful and aristocratic dames belonging to the Court of the Duke of Orleans, as they swept up and down the wide entrance stairs; who had often passed whole nights gazing at the arched windows of the Keep at Vez, when the whole place was lit up for some festivity, he, that same man, now asked himself, if what he had so ambitiously desired to have, a lady of rank and a rich dwelling, would, after all, be so much worth possessing as a thatched roof and this sweet and gentle girl called Agnelette. And it was certain that, if this dear and charming little woman were to become his, he would be envied in turn by all the earls and barons in the countryside.

"Well, Agnelette," said Thibault, "and suppose

a man like myself were to offer himself as your husband, would you accept him?"

It has been already stated that Thibault was a handsome young fellow, with fine eyes and black hair, and that his travels had left him something better than a mere workman. And it must further be borne in mind that we readily become attached to those on whom we have conferred a benefit, and Agnelette had, in all probability, saved Thibault's life; for, under such strokes as Marcotte's, the victim would certainly have been dead before the thirty-sixth had been given.

"Yes," she said, "if it would be a good thing for my grandmother?"

Thibault took hold of her hand.

"Well then, Agnelette," he said, "we will speak again about this, dear child, and that as soon as may be."

"Whenever you like, Monsieur Thibault."

"And you will promise faithfully to love me if I marry you, Agnelette?"

"Do you think I should love any man besides my husband?"

"Never mind, I want you just to take a little oath, something of this kind, for instance; Monsieur Thibault, I swear that I will never love anyone but you."

"What need is there to swear? the promise of an honest girl should be sufficient for an honest man."

"And when shall we have the wedding, Agnelette?" and in saying this, Thibault tried to put his arm round her waist.

But Agnelette gently disengaged herself.

"Come and see my grandmother," she said, "it is for her to decide about it; you must content yourself this evening with helping me up with my load of heath, for it is getting late, and it is nearly three miles from here to Préciamont."

So Thibault helped her as desired, and then accompanied her on her way home as far as the Forest-fence of Billemont, that is until they came

in sight of the village steeple. Before parting, he so begged of pretty Agnelette to give him one kiss as an earnest of his future happiness that at last she consented, and then, far more agitated by this one kiss than she had been by the Baron's double embrace, Agnelette hastened on her way, in spite of the load which she was carrying on her head, and which seemed far too heavy for so slender and delicate a creature.

Thibault stood for some time looking after her as she walked away across the moor. All the flexibility and grace of her youthful figure were brought into relief as the girl lifted her pretty rounded arms to support the burden upon her head, and thus silhouetted against the dark blue of the sky she made a delightful picture. At last, having reached the outskirts of the village, the land dipping at that point, she suddenly disappeared, passing out of sight of Thibault's admiring eyes. He gave a sigh, and stood still, plunged in thought; but it was not the satisfaction of thinking that this sweet and good young creature might one day be his that had caused his sigh. Quite the contrary; he had wished for Agnelette, because Agnelette was young and pretty, and because it was part of his unfortunate disposition to long for everything that belonged or might belong to another. His desire to possess Agnelette had been quickened by the innocent frankness with which she had talked to him; but it had been a matter of fancy rather than of any deeper feeling, of the mind, and not of the heart. For Thibault was incapable of loving as a man ought to love, who, being poor himself, loves a poor girl; in such a case there should be no thought, no ambition on his part beyond the wish that his love may be returned. But it was not so with Thibault; on the contrary, I repeat, the farther he walked away from Agnelette, leaving it would seem his good genius farther behind him with every step, the more urgently did his envious longings begin again as usual to torment his soul. It was dark when he reached home.

CHAPTER IV

THE BLACK WOLF

THIBAULT'S first thought was to get himself some supper, for he was terribly tired. The past day had been an eventful one for him, and certain things which had happened to him had evidently been calculated to produce a craving for food. The supper, it must be said, was not quite such a savoury one as he had promised himself, when starting to kill the buck; but the animal, as we know, had not been killed by Thibault, and the ferocious hunger which now consumed him made his black bread taste almost as delicious as venison.

He had hardly, however, begun his frugal repast, when he became conscious that his goat—of which I think we have already spoken—was uttering the most plaintive bleatings. Thinking that she, too, was in want of her supper, he went into the lean-to for some fresh grass, which he then carried to her, but as he opened the little door of the shed, out she rushed with such precipitancy that she nearly knocked Thibault over, and without stopping to take the provender he had brought her, ran towards the house. Thibault threw down the bundle of grass and went after her, with the intention of re-installing her in her proper place; but he found that this was more than he was able to do. He had to use all his force to get her along, for the goat, with all the strength of which a beast of her kind is capable, resisted all his efforts to drag her back by the horns, arching her back, and stubbornly refusing to move. At last, however, being vanquished in the struggle, it ended by the goat being

once more shut up in her shed, but, in spite of the plentiful supper which Thibault left her with, she continued to utter the most lamentable cries. Perplexed, and cross at the same time, the shoe-maker again rose from his supper and went to the shed, this time opening the door so cautiously that the goat could not escape. Once inside he began feeling about with his hands in all the nooks and corners to try and discover the cause of her alarm. Suddenly his fingers came in contact with the warm, thick coat of some other animal. Thibault was not a coward, far from it, none the less, he drew back hastily. He returned to the house and got a light, but it almost fell from his hand, when, on re-entering the shed, he recognised in the animal that had so frightened the goat, the buck of the Lord of Vez; the same buck that he had followed, had failed to kill, that he had prayed for in the devil's name, if he could not have it in God's; the same that had thrown the hounds out; the very same in short which had cost him such hard blows. Thibault, after assuring himself that the door was fastened, went gently up to the animal; the poor thing was either so tired, or so tame, that it did not make the slightest attempt to move, but merely gazed out at Thibault with its large dark velvety eyes, rendered more appealing than ever by the fear which agitated it.

"I must have left the door open," muttered the shoe-maker to himself, "and the creature, not knowing where to hide itself, must have taken refuge here." But on thinking further over the matter, it came back to him that when he had gone to open the door, only ten minutes before, for the first time, he had found the wooden bolt pushed so firmly into the staple that he had had to get a stone to hammer it back; and then, besides, the goat, which, as we have seen, did not at all relish the society of the new-comer, would certainly have run out of the shed before, if the door had been open. What was, however, still more surprising was that Thibault, looking more closely at the buck,

aw that it had been fastened up to the rack by a ord.

Thibault, as we have said, was no coward, but ow a cold sweat began to break out in large drops n his brow, a curious kind of a shiver ran through is body, and his teeth chattered violently. He ent out of the shed, shutting the door after him, nd began looking for his goat, which had taken dvantage of the moment when the shoemaker had one to fetch a light, and ran again into the house, here she was now lying beside the hearth, having vidently quite made up her mind this time not to orsake a resting-place, which, for that night at east, she found preferable to her usual abode.

Thibault had a perfect remembrance of the unoly invocation he had addressed to Satan, and lthough his prayer had been miraculously answered, e still could not bring himself to believe that there as any diabolic intervention in the matter.

As the idea, however, of being under the proection of the spirit of darkness filled him with an nstinctive fear, he tried to pray; but when he ished to raise his hand to make the sign of the ross on his forehead, his arm refused to bend, nd although up to that time he had never missed a ay saying his *Ave Maria*, he could not remember single word of it.

These fruitless efforts were accompanied by a errible turmoil in poor Thibault's brain; evil oughts came rushing in upon him, and he seemed hear them whispering all around him, as one ears the murmur of the rising tide, or the laughing f the winter wind through the leafless branches f the trees.

"After all," he muttered to himself, as he sat ale, and staring before him, "the buck is a fine indfall, whether it comes from God or the Devil, nd I should be a fool not to profit by it. If I am fraid of it as being food sent from the nether egions, I am in no way forced to eat it, and what more, I could not eat it alone, and if I asked anyne to partake of it with me, I should be betrayed;

the best thing I can do is to take the live beast ove to the Nunnery of Saint-Rémy, where it will serv as a pet for the Nuns and where the Abbess wi give me a good round sum for it. The atmospher of that holy place will drive the evil out of it, an I shall run no risk to my soul in taking a handful o consecrated crown pieces.

"What days of sweating over my work, an turning my augur it would take to earn even th quarter of what I shall get by just leading the beas to its new fold! The devil who helps one is certainl better worth than the angel who forsakes one. I my lord Satan wants to go too far with me, it wil then be time enough to free myself from his claws bless me! I am not a child, nor a young lamb lik Georgine, and I am able to walk straight in fron of me and go where I like." He had forgotten unhappy man, as he boasted of being able to g where and how he liked, that only five minute before he had tried in vain to lift his hand to hi head.

Thibault had such convincing and excellent reason ready to hand, that he quite made up his mind t keep the buck, come whence it might, and ever went so far as to decide that the money he receive for it should be devoted to buying a wedding dres for his betrothed. For, strange to say, by som freak of memory, his thoughts would keep returnin towards Agnelette; and he seemed to see her cla in a long white dress with a crown of white lilies o her head and a long veil. If, he said to himself, he could have such a charming guardian angel i his house, no devil, however strong and cunnin he might be, would ever dare to cross the threshold. "So," he went on, "there is always that remedy at hand, and if my lord Satan begins to be too troublesome, I shall be off to the grandmother to ask for Agnelette; I shall marry her, and if I cannot remember my prayers or am unable to make the sign of the cross, there will be a dear pretty little woman, who has had no traffic with Satan, who will do all that sort of thing for me."

Having more or less reassured himself with the dea of his compromise, Thibault, in order that the ›uck should not run down in value, and might be ıs fine an animal as possible to offer to the holy adies, to whom he calculated to sell it, went and illed the rack with fodder and looked to see that he litter was soft and thick enough for the buck o rest fully at its ease. The remainder of the night ›assed without further incident, and without even bad dream.

The next morning, my lord Baron again went ıunting, but this time it was not a timid deer that ıeaded the hounds, but the wolf which Marcotte ıad tracked the day before and had again that norning traced to his lair.

And this wolf was a genuine wolf, and no nistake; it must have seen many and many a year, lthough those who had that morning caught sight f it while on its track had noted with astonishment hat it was black all over. Black or grey, however, was a bold and enterprising beast, and promised ome rough work to the Baron and his huntsmen. irst started near Vertefeuille, in the Dargent covert, had made over the plain of Meutard, leaving Fleury nd Dampleux to the left, crossed the road to Ferté-Milou, and finally begun to run cunning in the Ivors oppices. Then, instead of continuing in the same irection, it doubled, returning along the same track had come, and so exactly retracing its own steps, ıat the Baron, as he galloped along, could istinguish the prints left by his horse's hoofs that ame morning.

Back again in the district of Bourg-Fontaine, he ınged in the country, leading the hunt right to the ery spot where the misadventures of the previous ay had had their start, the vicinity of the shoe-ıaker's hut.

Thibault, we know, had made up his mind what › do in regard to certain matters, and as he intended oing over to see Agnelette in the evening, he had arted work early.

You will naturally ask why, instead of sitting down

to a work which brought in so little, as he himself acknowledged, Thibault did not start off at once to take his buck to the ladies of Saint-Rémy. Thibault took very good care to do nothing of the sort; the day was not the time to be leading a buck through the forest of Villers-Cotterets; the first keeper he met would have stopped him, and what explanation could he have given? No, Thibault had arranged in his own mind to leave home one evening about dusk, to follow the road to the right, then go down the sandpit lane which led into the Chemin du Pendu, and he would then be on the common of Saint-Rémy, only a hundred paces or so from the Convent.

Thibault no sooner caught the first sound of the horn and the dogs, than he immediately gathered together a huge bundle of dried heather, which he hastily piled up in front of the shed, where his prisoner was confined, so as to hide the door, in case the huntsmen and their master should halt in front of his hut, as they had done the day before. He then sat down again to his work, applying to it an energy unknown even to himself before, bending over the shoe he was making with an intentness which prevented him from even lifting his eyes. All at once he thought he detected a sound like something scratching at the door; he was just going through from his lean-to to open it when the door fell back, and to Thibault's great astonishment an immense black wolf entered the room, walking on its hind legs. On reaching the middle of the floor, it sat down after the fashion of wolves, and looked hard and fixedly at the sabot-maker.

Thibault seized a hatchet which was within reach, and in order to give a fit reception to his strange visitor, and to terrify him, he flourished the weapon above his head.

A curious mocking expression passed over the face of the wolf, and then it began to laugh.

It was the first time that Thibault had ever heard a wolf laugh. He had often heard tell that wolves barked like dogs, but never that they laughed like human beings. And what a laugh it was! If a man

had laughed such a laugh, Thibault would verily and indeed have been scared out of his wits.

He brought his lifted arm down again.

"By my lord of the cloven foot," said the wolf, in a full and sonorous voice, "you are a fine fellow! At your request, I send you the finest buck from His Royal Highness's forests, and in return, you want to split my head open with your hatchet; human gratitude is worthy to rank with that of wolves." On hearing a voice exactly like his own coming forth from a beast's mouth, Thibault's knees began to shake under him, and the hatchet fell out of his hand.

"Now then," continued the wolf, "let us be sensible and talk together like two good friends. Yesterday you wanted the Baron's buck, and I led it myself into your shed, and for fear it should escape, I tied it up myself to the rack. And for all this you take your hatchet to me!"

"How should I know who you were?" asked Thibault.

"I see, you did not recognise me! A nice sort of excuse to give."

"Well, I ask you, was it likely I should take you for a friend under that ugly coat?"

"Ugly coat, indeed!" said the wolf, licking his fur with a long tongue as red as blood. "Confound you! You are hard to please. However, it's not a matter of my coat; what I want to know is, are you willing to make me some return for the service I have done you?"

"Certainly," said the shoe-maker, feeling rather uncomfortable, "but I ought to know what your demands are. What is it? What do you want? Speak!"

"First of all, and above all things, I should like a glass of water, for those confounded dogs have run me until I am out of breath."

"You shall have it in a moment, my lord wolf."

And Thibault ran and fetched a bowl of fresh, clear water from a brook which ran some ten paces from the hut. The eager readiness with which he

complied with the wolf's request betrayed his feeling of relief at getting out of the bargain so cheaply.

As he placed the bowl in front of the wolf, he made the animal a low bow. The wolf lapped up the contents with evident delight, and then stretched himself on the floor with his paws straight out in front of him, looking like a sphinx.

"Now," he said, "listen to me."

"There is something else you wish me to do?" asked Thibault, inwardly quaking.

"Yes, a very urgent something," replied the wolf. "Do you hear the baying of the dogs?"

"Indeed I do, they are coming nearer and nearer, and in five minutes they will be here."

"And what I want you to do is to get me out of their way."

"Get you out of their way! and how?" cried Thibault, who but too well remembered what it had cost him to meddle with the Baron's hunting the day before.

"Look about you, think, invent some way of delivering me!"

"The Baron's dogs are rough customers to deal with, and you are asking neither more nor less than that I should save your life; for I warn you, if they once get hold of you, and they will probably scent you out, they will make short work of pulling you to pieces. And now supposing I spare you this disagreeable business," continued Thibault, who imagined that he had now got the upper hand, "what will you do for me in return?"

"Do for you in return?" said the wolf, "and how about the buck?"

"And how about the bowl of water?" said Thibault.

"We are quits there, my good sir."—"Let us start a fresh business altogether; if you are agreeable to it, I am quite willing."

"Let it be so then; tell me quickly what you want of me."

"There are folks," proceeded Thibault, "who might take advantage of the position you are now

in, and ask for all kinds of extravagant things, riches, power, titles, and what not, but I am not going to do anything of the kind; yesterday I wanted the buck, and you gave it me, it is true; to-morrow, I shall want something else. For some time past I have been possessed by a kind of mania, and I do nothing but wish first for one thing and then for another, and you will not always be able to spare time to listen to my demands. So what I ask for is, that, as you are the devil in person or someone very like it, you will grant me the fulfilment of every wish I may have from this day forth."

The wolf put on a mocking expression of countenance. "Is that all?" he said. "Your peroration does not accord very well with your exordium."

"Oh!" continued Thibault, "my wishes are honest and moderate ones, and such as become a poor peasant like myself. I want just a little corner of ground, and a few timbers, and planks; that's all that a man of my sort can possibly desire."

"I should have the greatest pleasure in doing what you ask," said the wolf, "but it is simply impossible, you know."

"Then I am afraid you must make up your mind to put up with what the dogs may do to you."

"You think so, and you suppose I have need of your help, and so you can ask what you please?"

"I do not suppose it, I am sure of it."

"Indeed! well then, look."

"Look where?" asked Thibault.

"Look at the spot where I was," said the wolf. Thibault drew back in horror. The place where the wolf had been lying was empty; the wolf had disappeared, where or how it was impossible to say. The room was intact, there was not a hole in the roof large enough to let a needle through, nor a crack in the floor through which a drop of water could have filtered.

"Well, do you still think that I require your assistance to get out of trouble?" said the wolf.

"Where the devil are you?"

"If you put a question to me in my real name,"

said the wolf with a sneer in his voice, "I shall b obliged to answer you. I am still in the same place."

"But I can no longer see you!"

"Simply because I am invisible."

"But the dogs, the huntsmen, the Baron, wi come in here after you?"

"No doubt they will, but they will not find me."

"But if they do not find you, they will set upo me."

"As they did yesterday; only yesterday yo were sentenced to thirty-six strokes of the strap for having carried off the buck; to-day, you will b sentenced to seventy-two, for having hidden th wolf, and Agnelette will not be on the spot to bu you off with a kiss."

"Phew! what am I to do?"

"Let the buck loose; the dogs will mistake th scent, and they will get the blows instead of you."

"But is it likely such trained hounds will follo the scent of a deer in mistake for that of a wolf?"

"You can leave that to me," replied the voice, "only do not lose any time, or the dogs will b here before you have reached the shed, and tha would make matters unpleasant, not for me, whom they would not find, but for you, whom they would."

Thibault did not wait to be warned a second time, but was off like a shot to the shed. He unfastened the buck, which, as if propelled by some hidden force, leapt from the house, ran round it, crossing the track of the wolf, and plunged into the Baisemont coppice. The dogs were within a hundred paces of the hut; Thibault heard them with trepidation; the whole pack came with full force against the door, one hound after the other.

Then, all at once, two or three gave cry and went off in the direction of Baisemont, the rest of the hounds after them.

The dogs were on the wrong scent; they were on the scent of the buck, and had abandoned that of the wolf.

Thibault gave a deep sigh of relief; he watched

the hunt gradually disappearing in the distance, and went back to his room to the full and joyous notes of the Baron's horn.

He found the wolf lying composedly on the same spot as before, but how it had found its way in again was quite as impossible to discover as how it had found its way out.

CHAPTER V

THE PACT WITH SATAN

THIBAULT stopped short on the threshold, overcome with astonishment at this reapparition. "I was saying," began the wolf, as if nothing had happened to interrupt the conversation, "that it is out of my power to grant you the accomplishment of all the wishes you may have in future for your own comfort and advancement."

"Then I am to expect nothing from you?"

"Not so, for the ill you wish your neighbour can be carried out with my help."

"And, pray, what good would that do me personally?"

"You fool! has not a moralist said, 'There is always something sweet to us in the misfortune of our friends—even the dearest.'"

"Was it a wolf said that? I did not know wolves could boast of moralists among their number."

"No, it was not a wolf, it was a man."

"And was the man hanged?"

"On the contrary, he was made Governor of part of Poitou—there are, to be sure, a good many wolves in that province; well then, if there is something pleasant in the misfortune of our best friend, cannot you understand what a subject of rejoicing the misfortune of our worst enemy must be!"

"There is some truth in that, certainly," said Thibault.

"Without taking into consideration that there is always an opportunity of profiting by our neighbour's calamity, whether he be friend or foe."

Thibault paused for a minute or two to consider before he answered:

"By my faith, you are right there, friend wolf, nd suppose, then, you do me this service, what hall you expect in exchange? I suppose it will ave to be a case of give and take, eh?"

"Certainly. Every time that you express a wish hat is not to your immediate advantage, you will ave to repay me with a small portion of your erson."

Thibault drew back with an exclamation of fear.

"Oh! do not be alarmed! I shall not demand pound of flesh, as a certain Jew of my acquaintance id from his debtor."

"What is it then you ask of me?"

"For the fulfilment of your first wish, one of our hairs; two hairs for the second wish, four for he third, and so on, doubling the number each ime."

Thibault broke into a laugh: "If that is all you equire, Master Wolf, I accept on the spot; and I hall try to start with such a comprehensive wish, hat I shall never need to wear a wig. So let it be greed between us!" and Thibault held out his and. The black wolf lifted his paw, but he kept t raised.

"Well?" said Thibault.

"I was only thinking," replied the wolf, "that have rather sharp claws, and, without wishing to o so, I might hurt you badly; but I see a way hereby to clinch the bargain without any damage one to you. You have a silver ring, I have a gold ne; let us exchange; the barter will be to your dvantage, as you see." And the wolf held out s paw. Thibault saw a ring of the purest gold hining under the fur of what corresponded to he ring finger, and accepted the bargain without esitation; the respective rings then changed wnership.

"Good!" said the wolf, "now we two are arried."

"You mean betrothed, Master Wolf," put in hibault. "Plague upon you! you go too fast."

"We shall see about that, Master Thibault. And

now do you go back to your work, and I'll go back to mine."

"Good-bye, my lord Wolf."

"Till we meet again, Master Thibault."

The wolf had hardly uttered these last words, on which it had laid an unmistakable emphasis, ere it disappeared like a pinch of lighted gun-powder, and like the gun-powder, left behind a strong smell of sulphur.

Thibault again stood for a moment dumbfounded. He had not yet grown accustomed to this manner of making one's exit, to use a theatrical expression; he looked round him on every side, but the wolf was not there.

At first he thought the whole thing must have been a dream, but, looking down, he saw the devil's ring on the third finger of his right hand; he drew it off and examined it. He saw a monogram engraved on the inner side, and looking more closely, perceived that it was formed of two letters, T. and S.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, in a cold sweat, "Thibault and Satan, the family names of the two contracting parties. So much the worse for me! but when one gives oneself to the devil, one has to do it without reserve."

And Thibault began humming a song, trying to drown his thoughts, but his own voice filled him with fear, for there was a new and curious sound in it, even to his own ears. So he fell silent, and went back to his work as a distraction.

He had only just begun, however, to shape his wooden shoe, when, some distance off, from the direction of Baisemont, he again heard the baying of the hounds, and the notes of the Baron's horn. Thibault left off working to listen to these various sounds.

"Ah, my fine Lord, you may chase your wolf as long as you like; but I can tell you, you won't get this one's paw to nail up over the door of your Castle. What a lucky beggar I am! here am I, almost as good as a magician, and while you ride

on, suspecting nothing, my brave dispenser of blows, I have but to say the word, and a spell will be cast over you whereby I shall be amply avenged."

And in thinking thus, Thibault suddenly paused.

"And, after all," he went on, "why shouldn't I revenge myself on this damned Baron and Master Marcotte? Pshaw! with only a hair at stake I may well gratify myself on this score." And so saying Thibault passed his hand through the thick, silky hair which covered his head like a lion's mane.

"I shall have plenty of hairs left to lose," he continued. "Why bother about one! And, besides, it will be an opportunity for seeing whether my friend the devil has been playing false with me or not. Very well then, I wish a serious accident to befall the Baron, and as for that good-for-nothing of a Marcotte, who laid on to me so roughly yesterday, it is only fair that something as bad again should happen to him."

While expressing this double wish, Thibault felt anxious and agitated to the last degree; for in spite of what he had already seen of the wolf's power, he still feared the devil might only have been playing on his credulity. After uttering his wish, he tried in vain to return to his work, he took hold of his parer, wrong side up, and took the skin off his fingers, and still going on with his paring he spoilt a pair of shoes worth a good twelve sous. As he was lamenting over this misfortune, and wiping the blood off his hand, he heard a great commotion in the direction of the valley; he ran into the Chrétiennelle road and saw a number of men walking slowly two and two in his direction. These men were the prickers and kennelmen of the Lord of Vez. The road they were traversing was about two miles long, so that it was some time before Thibault could distinguish what the men were doing, who were walking as slowly and solemnly as if forming part of a funeral procession. When, however, they got to within five hundred paces of him, he saw that they were carrying two rough litters, on which were

stretched two lifeless bodies, those of the Baron and of Marcotte. A cold sweat broke out over Thibault's forehead. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "What do I see here?"

What had happened was this:

Thibault's expedient for putting the dogs on the wrong scent had succeeded, and all had gone well as long as the buck remained in covert; but it doubled, when near Marolle, and while crossing the heath passed within ten paces of the Baron. The latter thought at first that the animal had been startled by hearing the hounds, and was trying to hide itself.

But at that moment, not more than a hundred paces behind him, the whole pack of hounds appeared, forty dogs, running, yelping, yelling, crying, some in a deep bass like great cathedral bells, others with the full sound of a gong, and again others in a falsetto key, like clarionettes out of tune, all giving cry at the top of their voices, as eagerly and merrily as if they had never followed the scent of any other beast.

Then the Baron gave way to one of his wild fits of rage, fits only worthy of Polichinello tearing a passion to tatters in a puppet-show. He did not shout, he yelled; he did not swear, he cursed. Not satisfied with lashing his dogs, he rode them down, trampling them beneath his horse's hoofs, flinging himself about in his saddle like a devil in a stoup of holy water.

All his maledictions were hurled at his chief pricker, whom he held responsible for the stupid blunder that had occurred. This time Marcotte had not a word to say either in explanation or excuse, and the poor man was terribly ashamed of the mistake his hounds had made, and mighty uneasy at the towering passion into which it had thrown my lord. He made up his mind therefore to do everything in the power of man, if possible more, to repair the one and calm the other, and so started off at full gallop, dashing among the trees and over the brushwood, crying out at the top of his voice,

vhile he slashed right and left with such vigour, hat every stroke of his whp cut into the flesh of he poor animals. "Back, dogs! back!" But in ain he rode, and whipped, and called aloud, the logs only seemed to become more wildly anxious o follow up the new-found scent, as if they recognised the buck of the day before, and were determined that their wounded self-esteem should have s revenge. Then Marcotte grew desperate, and etermined on the only course that seemed left. he river Ourcq was close by, the dogs were already n the point of crossing the water, and the one hance of breaking up the pack was to get across imself and whip back the dogs as they began to limb the opposite bank. He spurred his horse in he direction of the river, and leaped with it into he very middle of the stream, both horse and rider rriving safely in the water; but, unfortunately, as e have already mentioned, the river just at this me was terribly swollen with the rains, the horse as unable to stand against the violence of the urrent, and after being swept round two or three mes finally disappeared. Seeing that it was useless ying to save his horse, Marcotte endeavoured to isengage himself, but his feet were so firmly fixed n the stirrups that he could not draw them out, nd three seconds after his horse had disappeared, Marcotte himself was no longer to be seen.

Meanwhile, the Baron, with the remainder of the untsmen, had ridden up to the water's edge, and is anger was in an instant converted into grief nd alarm as soon as he became aware of the erilous situation of his pricker; for the Lord of ez had a sincere love towards those who ministered o his pleasure, whether man or beast. In a loud oice he shouted to his followers: "By all the owers of hell! Save Marcotte! Five and twenty uis, fifty louis, a hundred louis, to anyone who ill save him!" And men and horses, like so many artled frogs, leaped into the water, vying with ach other who should be first. The Baron was for ding into the river himself, but his henchmen held

him back, and so anxious were they to prevent the worthy Baron from carrying out his heroic intention that their affection for their master was fatal to the poor pricker. For one moment he was forgotten, but that last moment meant his death. He appeared once more above the surface, just where the river makes a bend; he was seen to battle against the water, and his face for an instant rose into view, as with one last cry he called to his hounds, "Back! dogs, back!" But the water again closed over him, stifling the last word, and it was not till a quarter of an hour later that his body was found lying on a little beach of sand on to which the current had washed him. Marcotte was dead; there was no doubt about it! This accident was disastrous in its effect on the Lord of Vez. Being the noble lord he was, he had somewhat of a liking for good wine; and this predisposed him ever so little to apoplexy, and now, as he came face to face with the corpse of his good servitor, the emotion was so great that the blood rushed to his head and brought on a fit.

Thibault felt appalled as he realised with what scrupulous exactness the black wolf had fulfilled his part of the contract, and not without a shudder did he think of the right Master Isengrin now had to claim an equal punctuality of payment in return. He began to wonder uneasily whether the wolf, after all, was the kind of being that would continue to be satisfied with a few hairs—and this the more that both at the moment of his wish and during the succeeding minutes during which it was being accomplished, he had not been conscious of the slightest sensation anywhere about the roots of his hair, not even of the least little tickling. He was far from being pleasantly affected by the sight of poor Marcotte's corpse; he had not loved him, it was true, and he had felt that he had good reason for not doing so; but his dislike to the defunct had never gone so far as to make him wish for his death, and the wolf had certainly gone far beyond his desires. At the same time, Thibault had never

recisely said what he did wish, and had left the olf a wide margin for the exercise of his malice; vidently he would have to be more careful in future stating exactly what he wanted, and above all, ore circumspect as regards any wish he might rmulate.

As to the Baron, although still alive, he was most as good as dead. From the moment when, the result of Thibault's wish, he had been struck own as it were by lightning, he had remained unonscious. His men had laid him on the heap of eather which the shoe-maker had piled up to hide e door of the shed, and troubled and frightened, ere ransacking the place to try and find some storative which might bring their master back to e. One asked for vinegar to put on his temples, nother for a key to put down his back, this one r a bit of board to slap his hands with, that for me sulphur to burn under his nose. In the idst of all this confusion was heard the voice of tle Engoulevent, calling out: "In the name of that's good, we don't want all this truck, we ant a goat. Ah! if only we had a goat!"

"A goat?" cried Thibault, who would have joiced to see the Baron recover, for it would lift least part of the burden now weighing on his nscience, and would also rid his dwelling of these arauders. "A goat? I have a goat!"

"Really! you have a goat?" cried Engoulevent, oh! my friends! now our dear master is saved!" And so overcome with joy was he that he flung arms round Thibault's neck, saying, "Bring t your goat, my friend! bring out your goat!" Thibault went to the shed and led out the goat, ich ran after him bleating.

"Hold it firmly by the horns," said the huntsman, and lift up one of its front feet." And as he gave word, the second huntsman drew from its eath a little knife which he carried in his belt, and gan carefully sharpening it on the grindstone ich Thibault used for his tools.

"What are you going to do?" asked the shoe-

maker, feeling somewhat uneasy about these preparations.

"What! don't you know," said Engoulevent, "that there is a little bone in the shape of a cross inside a goat's heart, which, if crushed into powder, is a sovran remedy for apoplexy?"

"You intend to kill my goat?" exclaimed Thibault, at the same time leaving hold of the goat's horns, and dropping its foot, "but I will not have it killed."

"Fie, fie!" said Engoulevent, "that is not at all a becoming speech, Monsieur Thibault. Would you value the life of our good master as of no more worth than that of your wretched goat? I am truly ashamed for you."

"It's easy for you to talk. This goat is all I have to depend upon, the only thing I possess. She gives me milk, and I am fond of her."

"Ah! Monsieur Thibault, you cannot be thinking of what you are saying—it is fortunate that the Baron does not hear you, for he would be broken-hearted to know that his precious life was being bargained for in that miserly way."

"And besides," said one of the prickers with a sneering laugh, "if Master Thibault values his goat at a price which he thinks only my lord can pay, there is nothing to prevent him coming to the Castle of Vez to claim this payment. The account can be settled with what was left over as due to him yesterday."

Thibault knew that he could not get the better of these men, unless he again called the devil to his aid; but he had just received such a lesson from Satan, that there was no fear of his exposing himself, at all events for a second time the same day, to similar good offices. His one desire for the time being was not to wish any sort of ill to any one of those present.

One man dead, another nearly so—Thibault found this lesson enough. Consequently, he kept his eyes turned away from the menacing and jeering countenances around him, for fear of being aggravated

:yond control. While his back was turned, the ›or goat's throat was cut, her piteous cry alone forming him of the fact; and it was no sooner lled than its heart, which had hardly ceased robbing, was opened in search of the little bone which Engoulevent had spoken. This found, it ıs ground into powder, mixed with vinegar diluted th thirteen drops of gall from the bladder con- ning it, the whole stirred together in a glass with e cross of a rosary, and then poured gently down e Baron's throat, after his teeth had been forced art with the blade of a dagger.

The effect of the draught was immediate and truly raculous. The Lord of Vez sneezed, sat up, and d in a voice, intelligible though still a little sky: "Give me something to drink."

Engoulevent handed him some water in a wooden nking-cup, a family possession, of which Thibault s very proud. But the Baron had no sooner put lips to it and become aware of what the vile, ›minable liquid was, which they had had the ›udence to offer him than, with an exclamation disgust, he flung the vessel and its contents lently against the wall, and the cup fell, smashed o a thousand pieces. Then in a loud and ıorous voice, which left no doubt of his perfect overy, he called out: "Bring me some wine." e of the prickers mounted and rode at full speed the Castle of Oigny, and there requested the lord the place to give him a flask or two of sound old rgundy; ten minutes after he was back again. o bottles were uncorked, and there being no sses at hand, the Baron put them in turn to his uth, draining each at a single draught.

'hen he turned himself round with his face to wall, and murmuring "Mâcon, 1743," fell into rofound slumber.

CHAPTER VI

THE BEDEVILLED HAIR

THE huntsmen, being reassured with regard t their master's health, now went in search c the dogs, which had been left to carry on the chas alone. They were found lying asleep, the groun around them stained with blood. It was evider that they had run down the buck and eaten it; i any doubt on the matter remained, it was don away with bv the sight of the antlers, and a portio of the jaw bone, the only parts of the animal whic they could not crunch up, and which had therefor not disappeared. In short, they were the only one who had cause to be satisfied with the day's work The huntsmen, after shutting up the hounds i Thibault's shed, seeing that their master was sti sleeping, began to turn their thoughts to gettin some supper. They laid hands on everything the could find in the poor wretch's cupboard, an roasted the goat, politely inviting Thibault to tak a share in the meal towards the cost of which h had not a little contributed. He refused, givin as a plausible excuse, the great agitation he stil was under, owing to Marcotte's death and th Baron's accident.

He gathered up the fragments of his belove drinking-cup, and seeing that it was useless to thin of ever being able to put it together again, he bega turning over in his mind what it might be possibl for him to do, so as to free himself from the miser able existence which the events of the last tw days had rendered more insupportable than ever

'he first image that appeared to him was that of ıgnelette. Like the beautiful angels that pass efore the eyes of children in their dreams, he saw er figure, dressed all in white, with large white ings, floating across a blue sky. She seemed appy and beckoned to him to follow, saying the hile "Those who come with me will be very appy." But the only answer which Thibault ouchsafed to this charming vision was a movenent of the head and shoulders, which interpreted, neant, "Yes, yes, Agnelette, I see you, and ecognise you; yesterday, it would have been all ery well to follow you; but to-day I am, like a ing, the arbiter of life and death, and I am not ne man to make foolish concessions to a love only orn a day ago and which has hardly learnt to tammer out its first words. To marry you, my oor child, far from lessening the bitter hardships f our lives, would only double or treble the burden nder which we are both borne down. No, ıgnelette, no! You would make a charming nistress; but, a wife—she must be in a position to ring money to support the household, equal in roportion to the power which I should contribute."

His conscience told him plainly that he was ngaged to marry Agnelette; but he quieted it with ne assurance that if he broke the engagement, it ould be for the good of that gentle creature.

"I am an upright man," he murmured to himself, and it is my duty to sacrifice my personal pleasure o the welfare of the dear child. And more than hat, she is sufficiently young and pretty and good o find a better fate than what would await her as ne wife of a plain sabot-maker. And the end of ll these fine reflections was that Thibault felt himelf bound to allow his foolish promises of the day efore to melt away into air, and to forget the etrothal, of which the only witnesses had been the uivering leaves of the birch trees, and the pink lossom of the heather. It should be added that here was another mental vision, not wholly irresonsible for the resolution at which Thibault had

arrived—the vision of a certain young wido owner of the mill at Croyolles, a woman betwe twenty-six and twenty-eight, fresh and plump, wi fine, rolling eyes, not devoid of mischief. Mor over, she was credibly supposed to be the riche match in all the country-side, for her mill was nev idle; and so, for all reasons, as one can clearly se it was the very thing for Thibault.

Formerly, it would never have occurred i Thibault to aspire to anyone in the position of th rich and beautiful Madame Polet, for such wa the name of the owner of the mill; and this wi explain why her name is introduced here for th first time. And, in truth, it was the first time tha she had ever occurred as a subject of serious co sideration to our hero. He was astonished a himself for not having thought of her before, bu then, as he said to himself, he *had* often though about her, but without hope, while now, seeing tha he was under the protection of the wolf, and tha he had been endowed with a supernatural powe which he had already had occasion to exercise, i seemed to him an easy matter to get rid of all hi rivals and achieve his purpose. True there wer evil tongues that spoke of the owner of the mill a having something of an ill-temper and a har heart; but the shoemaker came to the conclusio that, with the devil up his sleeve, he need not troubl himself about any wicked spirit, any petty littl second-class demon that might find a corner i Widow Polet's disposition. And so, by the tim the day broke, he had decided to go to Croyolles for all these visions had of course visited hi during the night.

The Lord of Vez awoke with the first song o the birds; he had entirely recovered from his indisposition of the day before, and woke up his followers with loud slashings of his whip. Having sent off Marcotte's body to Vez, he decided that he would not return home without having killed something, but that he would hunt the boar, just as if nothing out of the way had taken place on the

revious day. At last, about six o'clock in the orning, they all went off, the Baron assuring hibault that he was most grateful to him for the ospitality that he himself and his men and dogs ad met with under his poor roof, in consideration which he was quite willing, he swore, to forget l the grievances which he had against the shoeaker.

It will be easily guessed that Thibault experienced tle regret at the departure of lord, dogs, and ntsmen. All these having at last disappeared, he ood a few moments contemplating his ransacked me, his empty cupboard, his broken furniture, s empty shed, the ground scattered with fragments his belongings. But, as he told himself, all this as the ordinary thing to happen whenever one of e great lords went through a place, and the ture, as it appeared to him, was far too brilliant allow him to dwell long on this spectacle. He essed himself in his Sunday attire, smartening mself as best he could, ate his last bit of bread th the last morsel left of his goat, went to the ring and drank a large glass of water, and started f for Croyolles. Thibault was determined to try s fortune with Madame Polet before the day was er, and therefore set out about nine o'clock in e morning.

The shortest way to Croyolles was round by the ar of Oigny and Pisseleu. Now Thibault knew ery in and out of the forest of Villers-Cotterets well as any tailor knows the pockets he has made; y, therefore, did he take the Chrétiennelle track, eing that it lengthened his journey by a good le and a half? Reader, it was because this lane uld bring him near to the spot where he had first en Agnelette, for, although practical considerans were carrying him in the direction of Croyolles ill, his heart was drawing him towards Préciaont. And there, as fate would have it, just after ssing the road that runs to La Ferté-Milou, he me upon Agnelette, cutting grass by the wayle for her goats. He might easily have passed

her without being seen, for her back was turne towards him; but the evil spirit prompted him, an he went straight up to her. She was stooping t cut the grass with her sickle, but hearing someon approaching she lifted her head, and blushed as sh recognised that it was Thibault. With the blus a happy smile rose to her face, which showed tha the rising colour was not due to any feeling c hostility towards him.

"Ah! there you are," she said. "I dream much of you last night, and prayed many prayer for you also." And as she spoke, the vision c Agnelette passing along the sky, with the garment and wings of an angel, and her hands joined i supplication, as he had seen her the previous night returned to him.

"And what made you dream of me and pray fo me, my pretty child?" asked Thibault with as uncon cerned an air as a young lord at Court. Agnelett looked at him with her large eyes of heavenly blue

"I dreamt of you, Thibault, because I lov you," she said, "and I prayed for you, becaus I saw the accident that happened to the Baron an his huntsmen, and all the trouble that you wer put to in consequence. . . . Ah! if I had been abl to obey the dictates of my heart, I should have ru to you at once to give you help."

"It is a pity you did not come; you would hav found a merry company, I can tell you."

"Oh! it was not for that I should have liked t be with you, but to be of use to you in receivin the Baron and his train. Oh! what a beautifu ring you have, Monsieur Thibault, where did yo get it?"

And the girl pointed to the ring which had bee given to Thibault by the wolf. Thibault felt hi blood run cold. "This ring?" he said.

"Yes, that ring," and seeing that Thibaul appeared unwilling to answer her, Agnelette turne her head aside, and sighed. "A present from some fine lady, I suppose," she said in a low voice.

"There you are mistaken, Agnelette," replied

ıibault with all the assurance of a consummate r, "it is our betrothal ring, the one I have ught to put on your finger the day we are ırried."

"Why not tell me the truth, Monsieur Thiult?" said Agnelette, shaking her head sadly.

"I am speaking the truth, Agnelette."

"No," and she shook her head more sadly than fore.

"And what makes you think that I am telling ie?"

"Because the ring is large enough to go over ɔ of my fingers." And Thibault's finger would tainly have made two of Agnelette's.

"If it is too large, Agnelette," he said, "we have it made smaller."

"Good-bye, Monsieur Thibault."

"What! Good-bye?"

"Yes."

"You are going to leave me?"

"Yes, I am going."

"And why, Agnelette?"

"Because I do not love liars."

'hibault tried to think of some vow he could ke to reassure Agnelette, but in vain.

"Listen," said Agnelette, with tears in her eyes, it was not without a great effort of self-control she was turning away, "if that ring is really nt for me. . . ."

"Agnelette, I swear to you that it is."

"Well then, give it me to keep till our wedding and on that day I will give it back to you, that may have it blessed."

"I will give it you with all my heart," replied ɔault, "but I want to see it on your pretty l. You were right in saying that it was too e for you, and as I am going into Villers-Cotterets ay, we will take the measure of your finger, I will get Monsieur Dugué, the goldsmith e, to alter it for us."

ıe smile returned to Agnelette's face and her were dried up at once. She put out her little

hand; Thibault took it between his own, turne it over and looked at it, first on the back and the on the palm, and stooping, kissed it.

"Oh!" said Agnelette, "you should not kiss m hand, Monsieur Thibault, it is not pretty enough.

"Give me something else then to kiss." An Agnelette lifted her face that he might kiss h on the forehead.

"And now," she said joyously, and with childi eagerness, "let me see the ring."

Thibault drew off the ring, and laughing, tri to put it on Agnelette's thumb; but, to his gre astonishment, he could not get it over the join "Well, well," he exclaimed, "who would ever ha thought such a thing?"

Agnelette began to laugh. "It is funny, isn it!" she said.

Then Thibault tried to pass it over the fi finger, but with the same result as when he p it on the thumb. He next tried the middle fing but the ring seemed to grow smaller and small as if fearing to sully this virgin hand; then the thi finger, the same on which he wore it himself, b it was equally impossible to get it on. And as made these vain attempts to fit the ring, Thiba felt Agnelette's hand trembling more and mo violently within his own, while the sweat fell fr his own brow, as if he were engaged in the mo arduous work; there was something diabolic the bottom of it, as he knew quite well. At l he came to the little finger and endeavoured to p the ring over it. This little finger, so small a transparent, that the ring should have hung loosely upon it as a bracelet on one of Thibault this little finger, in spite of all Agnelette's effor refused to pass through the ring. "Ah! my G Monsieur Thibault," cried the child, "what do this mean?"

"Ring of the Devil, return to the Devil!" cr Thibault, flinging the ring against a rock, in hope that it would be broken. As it struck rock, it emitted flame; then it rebounded, and

ebounding, fitted itself on to Thibault's finger. gnelette, who saw this strange evolution of the ng, looked at Thibault in horrified amazement. Well," he said, trying to brave it out, " what is e matter? "

Agnelette did not answer, but as she continued look at Thibault, her eye grew more and more ild and frightened. Thibault could not think what e was looking at, but slowly lifting her hand d pointing with her finger at Thibault's head, e said. " Oh! Monsieur Thibault, Monsieur hibault, what have you got there? "

" Where? " asked Thibault.

" There! there!" cried Agnelette, growing paler d paler.

" Well, but where? " cried the shoemaker, amping with his foot. " Tell me what you see."

But instead of replying, Agnelette covered her ce with her hands, and uttering a cry of terror, rned and fled away with all her might.

Thibault, stunned by what had happened, did not en attempt to follow her; he stood rooted to the ot, unable to move or speak, as if thunderstruck. What had Agnelette seen that had alarmed her ? What was it that she pointed to with her ger? Had God branded him, as He branded the st murderer? And why not? Had not he, like in, killed a man? and in the last sermon he had ard at Oigny had not the preacher said that all en were brothers? Thibault felt wild with misvings; what had so terrified Agnelette? That he ust find out without delay. At first he thought he ould go into the town of Bourg-Fontaine and look himself in a glass. But then, supposing the fatal ark was upon him, and others, besides Agnelette, ere to see it! No, he must think of some other y of finding out. He could, of course, pull his t over his brow, and run back to Oigny, where had a fragment of mirror in which he could see nself; but Oigny was a long way off. Then he membered that only a few paces from where he ood, there was a spring as transparent as crystal,

which fed the pond near Baisemont, and those a Bourg; he would be able to see himself in that a clearly as in the finest mirror from Saint-Gobain So Thibault went to the side of the stream and kneeling down, looked at himself. He saw the sam eyes, the same nose, and the same mouth, and no even the slightest little mark upon the forehead—he drew a breath of relief. But still, there must hav been something. Agnelette had certainly not take fright as she had for nothing. Thibault bent ove closer to the crystal water; and now he saw ther was something bright that shone amid the dark curl on his head and fell over his forehead. He leane closer still—it was a red hair. A red hair, but o a most peculiar red—not sandy coloured or carroty neither of a light shade nor a dark; but a red o the colour of blood, with a brightness of the mos vivid flame. Without stopping to consider how hair of such a phenomenal colour could possibly hav grown there, he began trying to pull it out. H drew forward the curl where gleamed the terribl red hair, that it might hang over the water, an then taking hold of it carefully between his finge and thumb gave it a violent pull; but the hair refuse to come away. Thinking that he had not go sufficient hold of it, he tried another way, windin the hair round his finger and again giving it vigorous jerk—the hair cut into his fingers bu remained as firmly rooted as ever. Thibault the turned it round two of his fingers and pulled again the hair lifted a little bit of his scalp, but as t moving, Thibault might as well have tried to mov the oak that threw its shady branches across th stream. Thibault began to think that he would d better to continue his walk to Croyolles; after all as he remarked to himself, the questionable colou of a single hair would hardly upset his plans o marriage. Nevertheless, the wretched hair cause him a great deal of worry; he could not get it ou of his mind, it seemed to dance before his eyes dazzling him like flames of running fire, until at last out of all patience, he stamped his foot, exclaiming

By all the devils in hell! I am not far from home
et, and I'll get the better of this confounded hair
omehow." Whereupon he set off running back
wards his hut, went in and found his fragment of
irror, got hold of his hair again, seized a
rpenter's chisel, placed it so as to cut off the hair
close to the head as possible, and keeping hair
d tool in this position, leant over his bench, and
g the chisel down with as much force as possible.
e tool cut deeply into the wood of the bench,
t the hair remained intact. He tried the same
an again, only this time he armed himself with a
allet, which he swung over his head and brought
wn with redoubled blows on the handle of the
isel—but he was as far as ever from carrying out
s purpose. He noticed, however, that there was a
tle notch in the sharp edge of the chisel, just the
dth of a hair. Thibault sighed; he understood now
at this hair, the price he had paid in return for
s wish, belonged to the black wolf, and he gave
all further attempts to get rid of it.

CHAPTER VII

THE BOY AT THE MILL

FINDING it impossible either to cut off or pu out the accursed hair, the only thing left fo Thibault to do was to hide it as well as he coul by bringing the other hair over it; everybody wou not, he hoped, have such eyes as Agnelette.

As we have already said, Thibault had a fine hea of black hair, and by parting it down the side, ar giving a certain turn to the front lock, he truste that the one hair would pass unobserved.

He recalled with envy the young lords whom h had seen at the court of Madame de Mainteno for, with their powdered wigs to cover it, th colour of their hair, whatever it might be, wa of no moment. He, unfortunately, could n make use of powder to hide his, being prohibite from doing so by the sumptuary laws of th period.

However, having successfully managed, by a adroit turn of the comb, to hide his one red ha artistically under the others, Thibault decided to sta again on his premeditated visit to the fair owner o the mill. He was careful this time, instead o inclining to the left, to verge towards the righ fearing to meet Agnelette if he followed the sam path as he had taken that morning.

Emerging, therefore, on to the road leading t La Ferté-Milou, he then took the footpath whic runs direct to Pisseleu across the fields. Arrivin at Pisseleu, he continued along the valley in th direction of Croyolles, but had scarcely pursued th

wer road for more than a few minutes when, alking just ahead of him, he saw two donkeys being iven by a tall youth, whom he recognised as a usin of his, named Landry. Cousin Landry was ad boy at the mill, in the service of the owner hom Thibault was on his way to visit, and as the tter had but an indirect acquaintance with the idow Polet, he had counted on Landry to introduce m. It was a lucky chance therefore to come across s cousin like this, and Thibault hastened to overke him.

Hearing footsteps behind him echoing his own, andry turned and recognised Thibault. Thibault ad always found Landry a pleasant and cheerful ompanion, and he was therefore very much stonished to see him looking sad and troubled. andry waited for Thibault to come up to him, tting his donkeys go on alone. Thibault was the rst to speak:

"Why, Cousin Landry," he asked, "what's the eaning of this? Here am I, putting myself out nd leaving my work to come and shake hands with friend and relation that I have not seen for more han six weeks, and you greet me with a face like hat!"

"Ah, my dear Thibault," replied Landry, "what ould you have of me! I may greet you with a loomy face, but, believe me or not as you will, am truly delighted to see you."

"That may be as you say, but you do not appear o."

"What do you mean?"

"You tell me you are delighted to see me in a one of voice fit to bring on the blue-devils. Why, ny dear Landry, you are generally as bright and vely as the click-clack of your mill, and singing ongs to accompany it, and to-day you are as helancholy as the crosses in the cemetery. How ow then! has the mill stopped for want of vater?"

"Oh! not that! there is no want of water; on he contrary, there is more than usual, and the sluice

is kept constantly at work. But, you see, instead corn, it is my heart that is in the mill, and the m works so well and so incessantly, and my heart is s ground between the stones that there is nothing le of it but a little powder."

"Indeed! Are you so miserable then at th mill?"

"Ah! would to God I had been dragged und the wheel the first day I put my foot inside it!"

"But what is it? you frighten me, Landry! . . tell me all your troubles, my dear lad."

Landry gave a deep sigh.

"We are cousins," continued Thibault, "and if am too poor to give you a few crowns to help yo out of any money trouble you are in, well, I can a least give you some words of good advice if it is matter of the heart that is causing you grief."

"Thank you, Thibault; but neither money no advice can do me any good."

"Well, anyhow, tell me what is the matter; i eases trouble to speak of it."

"No, no; it would be useless; I will say nothing."

Thibault began to laugh.

"You laugh?" said Landry, both angry an astonished, "my trouble makes you laugh?"

"I am not laughing at your trouble, Landry, bu at your thinking that you can hide the cause of i from me, when it is as easy as anything to gues what it is."

"Guess then."

"Why, you are in love; nothing more difficul than that to guess, I can swear."

"I, in love!" exclaimed Landry; "why, who ha been telling you lies like that?"

"It is not a lie, it is the truth."

Landry again drew a deep sigh, more laden with despair even than his former one.

"Well, yes!" he said, "it is so, I am in love!"

"Ah! that's right! you have spoken out at last!" said Thibault, not without a certain quickening o the pulse, for he foresaw a rival in his cousin, "and with whom are you in love?"

"With whom?"

"Yes, I ask you with whom?"

"As to that, Cousin Thibault, you will have to rag the heart out of my breast before I tell you."

"You have told me already."

"What? I have told you who it is?" cried andry, staring at Thibault with astonished eyes.

"Certainly you have."

"Surely you cannot mean it!"

"Did you not say that it would have been better r you to have been dragged under by the mill heel the first day you entered into the service of adame Polet than to have been taken on by her chief hand? You are unhappy at the mill, and u are in love; therefore, you are in love with the istress of the mill, and it is this love which is using your unhappiness."

"Ah, Thibault, pray hush! what if she were to erhear us!"

"How is it possible that she can overhear us; here do you imagine her to be, unless she is able make herself invisible, or to change herself into utterfly or a flower?"

"Never mind, Thibault, you keep quiet."

"Your mistress of the mill is hard-hearted then, she? and takes no pity on your despair, poor low?" was Thibault's rejoinder; but his words, ough seemingly expressive of great commiseration, d a shade of satisfaction and amusement in them.

"Hard-hearted! I should think so indeed!" d Landry. "In the beginning, I was foolish ough to fancy that she did not repulse my e. . . . All day long I was devouring her with eyes, and now and then, she too would fix her s on me, and after looking at me a while, would ile. . . . Alas! my dear Thibault, what happiness se looks and smiles were to me! . . . . Ah! y did I not content myself with them?"

"Well, there it is," said Thibault philosophically. Man is so insatiable."

"Alas! yes; I forgot that I had to do with some- e above me in position, and I spoke. Then

Madame Polet flew into a great rage, called m an insolent beggar, and threatened to turn me ou of doors the very next week."

"Phew!" said Thibault, "and how long ago i that?"

"Nearly three weeks."

"And the following week is still to come?" Th shoemaker as he put the question began to feel a revival of the uneasiness which had been momentaril allayed, for he understood women better than hi cousin Landry. After a minute's silence, h continued: "Well, well, you are not so unhapp after all as I thought you."

"Not so unhappy as you thought me?"

"No."

"Ah! if you only knew the life I lead! never a look, never a smile! When she meets me she turn away, when I speak to her on matters concernin the mill, she listens with such a disdainful air tha instead of talking of bran and wheat and rye, o barley and oats, of first and second crops, I begi to cry, and then she says to me, '*Take care*!' i such a menacing tone, that I run away and hid myself behind the bolters."

"Well, but why do you pay your addresses t this mistress of yours? There are plenty of girls i the country round who would be glad to have yo for their wooer."

"Because I love her in spite of myself, I canno help it, so there!"

"Take up with some one else; I'd think no mor about her."

"I could not do it."

"At any rate, you might try. It's just possible that if she saw you transferring your affections to another, the mistress of the Mill might grow jealous, and might then run after you, as you are now running after her. Women are such curious creatures?"

"Oh, if I was sure of that, I would begin to try at once . . . . although now . . . ." and Landry shook his head.

"Well, what about . . . now?"

"Although now, after all that has happened, it would be of no use."

"What has happened then?" asked Thibault, who was anxious to ascertain all particulars.

"Oh! as to that, nothing," replied Landry, "and I do not even dare speak of it."

"Why?"

"Because, as they say with us, 'Best let sleeping dogs lie.'"

Thibault would have continued to urge Landry to tell him what the trouble was to which he referred, but they were now near the Mill, and their explanation would have to remain unfinished, even if once begun. What was more, Thibault thought that he already knew enough; Landry was in love with the fair owner of the Mill, but the fair owner of the Mill was not in love with Landry. And, in truth, he feared no danger from a rival such as this. It was with a certain pride and self-complacency that he compared the timid, boyish looks of his cousin, a mere lad of eighteen, with his own five feet six and well-set figure, and he was naturally led into thinking that, however little of a woman of taste Madame Polet might be, Landry's failure was a good reason for believing that his own success was assured. The Mill at Croyolles is charmingly situated at the bottom of a cool green valley; the stream that works it forms a little pond, which is shaded by pollard willows, and slender poplars; and between these dwarfed and giant trees stand magnificent alders, and immense walnut trees with their fragrant foliage. After turning the wheel of the mill, the foaming water runs off in a little rivulet, which never ceases its hymn of joy as it goes leaping over the pebbles of its bed, starring the flowers that lean coquettishly over to look at themselves in its clear shadows with the liquid diamonds that are scattered by its tiny waterfalls.

The Mill itself lies so hidden in a bower of shrubs, behind the sycamores and weeping willows, that until one is within a short distance of it, nothing is to be seen but the chimney from which the smoke

rises against the background of trees like a colum of blue tinted alabaster. Although Thibault wa familiar with the spot, the sight of it filled him, a he now looked upon it, with a feeling of deligh which he had not hitherto experienced; but then h had never before gazed on it under the condition in which he now found himself, for he was alread conscious of that sense of personal satisfactio which the proprietor feels on visiting an estat which has been obtained for him by proxy. O entering the farmyard, where the scene was mor animated, he was moved to even greater ecstas of enjoyment.

The blue and purple-throated pigeons were cooin on the roofs, the ducks quacking, and going throug sundry evolutions in the stream, the hens wer clucking on the dung-heap, and the turkey cock bridling and strutting as they courted the turkey hens, while the brown and white cows came slowl in from the fields, their udders full of milk. Here on one side, a cart was being unloaded, there, a they were being unharnessed, two splendid horse neighed and stretched their necks, now freed fron the collar, towards their mangers; a boy was carryin a sack up into the granary, and a girl was bringin another sack filled with crusts and the refuse wate to an enormous pig, that lay basking in the su waiting to be transformed into salt-pork, sausages and black puddings; all the animals of the ark wer there, from the braying donkey to the crowing cock mingling their discordant voices in this rural concert while the mill with its regular click-clack, seeme to be beating time.

Thibault felt quite dazzled; he saw himself th owner of all that he now looked upon, and h rubbed his hands together with such evident pleasur that Landry, if he had not been so absorbed in hi own trouble, which grew ever greater as they drew nearer to the house, would certainly have notice this apparently causeless emotion of joy on hi cousin's part. As they entered the farmyard, th widow, who was in the dining-room, became awar

of their presence, and seemed very inquisitive to know who the stranger was who had returned with her head boy. Thibault, with an easy and confident sort of manner, went up to the dwelling-house, gave his name, and explained to her that, having a great wish to see his cousin Landry, he had decided to come over and introduce himself to her.

The mistress of the Mill was extremely gracious, and invited the newcomer to spend the day at the Mill, accompanying her invitation with a smile that Thibault took as a most favourable augury.

Thibault had not come unprovided with a present. He had unhooked some thrushes which he had found caught in a snare set with rowan-berries, as he came through the forest; and the widow sent them at once to be plucked, saying as she did so, that she hoped Thibault would stay to eat his share of them. But he could not help noticing that all the while she was speaking to him, she kept on looking over his shoulder at something which seemed to attract her attention, and turning quickly, he saw that the preoccupation of the fair owner of the Mill had evidently been caused by watching Landry, who was unloading his asses. Becoming conscious that Thibault had noticed the wandering of her looks and attention, Madame Polet turned as red as a cherry, but immediately recovering herself she said to her new acquaintance:

"Monsieur Thibault, it would be kind of you, who appear so robust, to go and help your cousin; you can see that the job is too heavy a one for him alone," and so saying, she went back into the house.

"Now, the devil!" muttered Thibault, as he looked first after Madame Polet and then at Landry, is the fellow after all more fortunate than he suspects himself, and shall I be forced to call the black wolf to my assistance to get rid of him?"

However, he went as the owner of the mill had asked him, and gave the required assistance. Feeling quite sure that the pretty widow was looking at him

through some chink or other of the curtain, he put forth all his strength, and displayed to the full his athletic grace in the accomplishment of the task in which he was sharing. The unloading finished, they all assembled in the dining-room where a waiting-maid was busy setting the table. As soon as dinner was served, Madame Polet took her place at the head of the table, with Thibault to her right. She was all attention and politeness to the latter, so much so indeed that Thibault, who had been temporarily crestfallen, took heart again, filled with hope. In order to do honour to Thibault's present, she had herself dressed the birds with juniper-berries, and so prepared, no more delicate or appetising dish could well have been provided. While laughing at Thibault's sallies, however, she cast stealthy glances now and again at Landry, who she saw had not touched what she herself had placed on the poor boy's plate, and also that great tears were rolling down his cheeks, and falling into the untasted juniper sauce. This mute sorrow touched her heart; a look almost of tenderness came into her face, as she made a sign to him with her head, which seemed to say, so expressive was it, "Eat, Landry, I beg of you." There was a whole world of loving promises in this little pantomime. Landry understood the gesture, for he nearly choked himself trying to swallow the bird at one mouthful, so eager was he to obey the orders of his fair mistress.

Nothing of all this escaped Thibault's eye.

He swore to himself, using an oath that he had heard in the mouth of the Seigneur Jean, and which, now that he was the friend of the devil, he fancied he might use like any other great lord: "Can it be possible," he thought, "that she is really in love with this slip of a youth? Well, if so, it does not say much for her taste, and more than that, it does not suit my plans at all. No, no, my fair mistress, what you need is a man who will know how to look well after the affairs of the mill, and that man will be myself or the black wolf will find himself in the wrong box."

Noticing a minute later that Madame Polet had nally gone back to the earlier stage of side-long lances and smiles which Landry had described to im, he continued, "I see I shall have to resort to tronger measures, for lose her I will not; there is ot another match in all the countryside that would uit me equally well. But then, what am I to do with Cousin Landry? his love, it is true, upsets my rrangements; but I really cannot for so small a hing send him to join the wretched Marcotte in the ther world. But what a fool I am to bother my rains about finding a way to help myself! It's the volf's business, not mine?" Then in a low voice: Black wolf," he said, "arrange matters in such way, that without any accident or harm happening o my Cousin Landry, I may get rid of him." The rayer was scarcely uttered when he caught sight f a small body of four or five men in military niform, walking down the hill-side and coming owards the mill. Landry also saw them; for he ttered a loud cry, got up as if to run away, and hen fell back in his chair, as if all power of movehent had forsaken him.

CHAPTER VIII

THIBAULT'S WISHES

THE widow, on perceiving the effect which the sight of the soldiers advancing towards the mill had upon Landry, was almost as frightened as the lad himself.

"Ah! dear God!" she cried, "what is the matter, my poor Landry?"

"Say, what is the matter?" asked Thibault in his turn.

"Alas!" replied Landry, "last Thursday, in a moment of despair, meeting the recruiting-sergeant at the *Dauphin* Inn, I enlisted."

"In a moment of despair!" exclaimed the mistress of the mill, "and why were you in despair?"

"I was in despair," said Landry, with a mighty effort, "I was in despair because I love you."

"And it is because you loved me, unhappy boy! that you enlisted?"

"Did you not say that you would turn me away from the mill?"

"And have I turned you away?" asked Madame Polet, with an expression which it was impossible to misinterpret.

"Ah! God! then you would not really have sent me away?" asked Landry.

"Poor boy!" said the mistress of the mill, with a smile and a pitying movement of the shoulders, which, at any other time, would have made Landry

most die of joy, but, as it was, only doubled his stress.

"Perhaps even now I might have time to hide," said.

"Hide!" said Thibault, "that will be of no use, can tell you."

"And why not?" said Madame Polet, "I am ing to try, anyhow. Come, dear Landry."

And she led the young man away, with every mark the most loving sympathy.

Thibault followed them with his eyes: "It's ing badly for you, Thibault, my friend," he said; fortunately, let her hide him as cleverly as she ay, they have a good scent, and will find him out."

In saying this, Thibault was unconscious that he as giving utterance to a fresh wish.

The widow had evidently not hidden Landry very r away, for she returned after a few seconds of sence; the hiding-place was probably all the safer r being near. She had scarcely had time to take eath when the recruiting-sergeant and his com- nions appeared at the door. Two remained outside, doubt to catch Landry if he should attempt to cape, the sergeant and the other soldier walked with the confidence of men who are conscious of ting under authority. The Sergeant cast a arching glance round the room, brought back s right foot into the third position and lifted his nd to the peak of his cap. The mistress of the ill did not wait for the Sergeant to address her, t with one of her most fascinating smiles, asked n if he would like some refreshment, an offer hich no recruiting-sergeant is ever known to fuse. Then, thinking it a favourable moment to t the question, she asked them while they were inking their wine, what had brought them to oyolles Mill. The Sergeant replied that he had me in search of a lad, belonging to the Mill, who, er drinking with him to his Majesty's health and ning his engagement, had not re-appeared. The l in question, interrogated as to his name and elling-place, had declared himself to be one

Landry, living with Madame Polet, a widow, own of the Mill at Croyolles. On the strength of th declaration, he had now come to Madame Pol widow, of Croyolles Mill, to reclaim the defaulter.

The widow, quite convinced that it was permissib to lie for a good cause, assured the Sergeant th she knew nothing of Landry, nor had any one that name ever been at the Mill.

The Sergeant in reply said that Madame had tl finest eyes and the most charming mouth in tl world, but that was no reason why he shou implicitly believe the glances of the one or the wor of the other. He was bound, therefore, he continue "to ask the fair widow to allow him to search tl Mill."

The search was begun, in about five minutes tl Sergeant came back into the room and aske Madame Polet for the key of her room. The wido appeared very much surprised and shocked at suc a request, but the Sergeant was so persistent an determined that at last she was forced to give u the key. A minute or two later, and the Sergear walked in again, dragging Landry in after him b the collar of his coat. When the widow saw the both enter, she turned deadly pale. As for Thibaul his heart beat so violently, that he thought it woul burst, for without the black wolf's assistance, h was sure the Sergeant would never have gone t look for Landry where he had found him.

"Ah! ah! my good fellow!" cried the Sergean in a mocking voice, "so we prefer the service o beauty to the King's service? That is easy t understand; but when one has the good fortune t be born in his Majesty's domains and to have drun his health, one has to give him a share of service when his turn comes. So you must come along wit us, my fine fellow, and after a few years in th King's uniform, you can come back and serve unde your old flag. So, now then, march!"

"But," cried the widow, "Landry is not ye twenty, and you have not the right to take hin under twenty."

"She is right," added Landry, "I am not twenty t."

"And when will you be twenty?"

"Not until to-morrow."

"Good," said the Sergeant, "we will put you night on a bed of straw, like a medlar, and by morrow, at daybreak, when we wake up, you will ripe."

Landry wept. The widow prayed, pleaded, im-ored, allowed herself to be kissed by the soldiers, tiently endured the coarse pleasantry excited by r sorrow, and at last offered a hundred crowns to y him off. But all was of no avail. Landry's ists were bound, and then one of the soldiers cing hold of the end of the cord, the party started , but not before the lad of the mill had found e to assure his dear mistress, that far or near, would always love her, and that, if he died, her me would be the last upon his lips. The beautiful dow, on her side, had lost all thought of the rld's opinion in face of this great catastrophe, d before he was led away, she clasped Landry her heart in a tender embrace.

When the little party had disappeared behind the llows, and she lost sight of them, the widow's tress became so overpowering that she became ensible, and had to be carried and laid on her d. Thibault lavished upon her the most devotedention. He was somewhat taken aback at the ong feeling of affection which the widow evinced his cousin; however, as this only made him plaud himself the more for having cut at the root the evil, he still cherished the most sanguine pes.

On coming to herself, the first name the widow ered was that of Landry, to which Thibault plied with a hypocritical gesture of commiseration. en the mistress of the mill began to sob. "Poor l!" she cried, while the hot tears flowed down r cheeks, "what will become of him, so weak d delicate as he is? The mere weight of his gun d knapsack will kill him!"

Then turning to her guest, she continued:

"Ah! Monsieur Thibault, this is a terrible trou to me, for you no doubt have perceived that I l him? He was gentle, he was kind, he had no fau he was not a gambler, nor a drinker; he wo never have opposed my wishes, would never h tyrannized over his wife, and that would h seemed very sweet to me after the two cruel ye that I lived with the late M. Polet. Ah! Monsi Thibault, Monsieur Thibault! It is a sad grief ind for a poor miserable woman to see all her antici tions of future happiness and peace thus sudde swallowed up!"

Thibault thought this would be a good mom to declare himself; whenever he saw a woman cryi he immediately thought, most erroneously, that only cried because she wished to be consoled.

He decided, however, that he would not be al to attain his object without a certain circumlocuti

"Indeed," he answered, "I quite understa your sorrow, nay, more than that, I share it w you, for you cannot doubt the affection I bear cousin. But we must resign ourselves, and witho wishing to deny Landry's good qualities, I wo still ask you, Madame, to find someone else w is his equal."

"His equal!" exclaimed the widow, "there no such person. Where shall I find so nice and good a youth? It was a pleasure to me to look his smooth young face, and with it all, he was self-composed, so steady in his habits! he was wor ing night and day, and yet I could with a glan make him shrink away and hide. No, no, Monsie Thibault, I tell you frankly, the remembrance him will prevent me ever wishing to look at anoth man, and I know that I must resign myself to remai ing a widow for the rest of my life."

"Phew!" said Thibault; "but Landry was ver young!"

"There is no disadvantage in that," replied th widow.

"But who knows if he would always have retaine

good qualities. Take my advice, Madame, do t grieve any more, but, as I say, look out for ne one who will make you forget him. What you lly need is not a baby-face like that, but a grown n, possessing all the qualities that you admire and ret in Landry, but, at the same time sufficiently ture to prevent the chance of finding one fine that all your illusions are dispersed, and that are left face to face with a libertine and a lly."

The mistress of the Mill shook her head; but ibault went on;

'In short, what you need, is a man who, while ning your respect, will at the same time make Mill work profitably. You have but to say the rd, and you would not have to wait long before found yourself well provided for, my fair dame, a good bit better than you were just w."

'And where am I to find this miracle of a man?" ed the widow, as she rose to her feet, looking iantly at the shoemaker, as if throwing down a llenge. The latter, mistaking the tone in which se last words were said, thought it an excellent asion to make known his own proposals, and ordingly hastened to profit by it.

'Well, I confess," he answered, "that when I d that a handsome widow like you would not have go far before finding the man who would be t the very husband for her, I was thinking of self, for I should reckon myself fortunate, and uld feel proud, to call myself your husband. Ah! assure you," he went on, while the mistress of Mill stood looking at him with ever-increasing pleasure in her eyes, "I assure you that with you would have no occasion to fear any opposition your wishes: I am a perfect lamb in the way of ntleness, and I should have but one law and one sire, my law would be to obey you, my desire please you! and as to your fortune, I have means adding to it which I will make known to you er on . . ."

But the end of Thibault's sentence remained u spoken.

"What!" cried the widow, whose fury was t greater for having been kept in check until the "What! you, whom I thought my friend, you da to speak of replacing him in my heart! you try dissuade me from keeping my faith to your cousi Get out of the place, you worthless scoundrel! o of the place, I say! or I will not answer for t consequences; I have a good mind to get four my men to collar you and throw you under t Mill-wheel."

Thibault was anxious to make some sort response, but, although ready with an answer c ordinary occasions, he could not for the mome think of a single word whereby to justify himsel True, Madame Polet gave him no time to thinl but seizing hold of a beautiful new jug that stoo near her, she flung it at Thibault's head. Luckil for him, Thibault dodged to the left and escape the missile, which flew past him, crashing to piece against the chimney-piece. Then the mistress of th house took up a stool, and aimed it at him with equa violence; this time Thibault dodged to the righ and the stool went against the window, smashin two or three panes of glass. At the sound of th falling glass, all the youths and maids of the Mil came running up. They found their mistress flingin bottles, water-jugs, salt-cellars, plates, everything i short that came to hand, with all her might a Thibault's head. Fortunately for him widow Pole was too much incensed to be able to speak; if sh had been able to do so, she would have called ou "Kill him! Strangle him! Kill the rascal! th scoundrel! the villain!"

On seeing the reinforcements arriving to help th widow, Thibault endeavoured to escape by the doo that had been left open by the recruiting party, bu just as he was running out, the good pig, that we saw taking its siesta in the sun, being roused ou of its first sleep by all this hullabaloo, and thinking the farm people were after it, made a dash for its

ye, and in so doing charged right against Thibault's gs. The latter lost his balance, and went rolling er and over for a good ten paces in the dirt and ish. "Devil take you, you beast!" cried the oemaker, bruised by his fall, but even more rious at seeing his new clothes covered with mud. e wish was hardly out of his mouth, when the g was suddenly taken with a fit of frenzy, and gan rushing about the farmyard like a mad imal, breaking, shattering, and turning over everying that came in its way. The farm hands, who d run to their mistress on hearing her cries, ought the pig's behaviour was the cause of them— d started off in pursuit of the animal. But it ded all their attempts to seize hold of it, knocking er boys and girls, as it had knocked Thibault over, til, at last, coming to where the mill was separated om the sluice by a wooden partition, it crashed rough the latter as easily as if it were made of per, threw itself under the mill wheel . . . and sappeared as if sucked down by a whirlpool. The stress of the mill had by this time recovered her eech. "Lay hold of Thibault!" she cried, for e had heard Thibault's curse, and had been amazed d horrified at the instantaneous way in which it d worked. "Lay hold of him! knock him down! is a wizard, a sorcerer! a were-wolf!"—applying Thibault with this last word, one of the most rrible epithets that can be given to a man in our rest lands. Thibault, who scarcely knew where was, seeing the momentary stupefaction which ok possession of the farm people on hearing their stress's final invective, made use of the oppority to dash past them, and while one went to t a pitch-fork and another a spade, he darted rough the farmyard gate, and began running up almost perpendicular hill-side at full speed, with ease which only confirmed Madame Polet's spicions, for the hill had always hitherto been oked upon as absolutely inaccessible, at any rate the way Thibault had chosen to climb it.

"What!" she cried, "what! you give in like

that! you should make after him, and seize ho of him, and knock him down!" But the far servants shook their heads.

"Ah! Madame!" they said, "what is the us what can we do against a were-wolf?"

CHAPTER IX

THE WOLF-LEADER

'HIBAULT, fleeing from before Madame Polet's threats and her farm servants' weapons, rned instinctively towards the forest, thinking take shelter within it, should he chance to me across one of the enemy, for he knew that one would venture to follow him there, for fear any lurking dangers. Not that Thibault had much fear, whatever kind of enemy he met, now that was armed with the diabolical power which he d received from the wolf. He had only to send em where he had sent the widow's pig, and he s sure of being rid of them. Nevertheless, nscious of a certain tightening of the heart when m time to time the thought of Marcotte came ck to him, he acknowledged to himself that, hower anxious to be rid of them, one could not send n to the devil quite as readily as one sent pigs.

While thus reflecting on the terrible power he ssessed, and looking back at intervals to see if re were any immediate need to put it into use, ibault, by the time night fell, had reached the r of Pisseleu. It was an autumn night, dark l stormy, with a wind that tore the yellowing ves from the trees, and wandered through the est ways with melancholy sighs and moanings. ese funereal voices of the wind were interrupted m time to time by the hooting of the owls, which nded like the cries of lost travellers, hailing one other. But all these sounds were familiar to ibault and made very little impression upon him.

Moreover he had taken the precaution, on fi entering the forest, of cutting a stick, four f long, from a chestnut tree, and adept as he was w the quarterstaff, he was ready, armed thus, to wi stand the attack of any four men. So he entered t forest with all boldness of heart, at the spot wh is known to this day as the Wolf's Heath. He h been walking for some minutes along a dark a narrow glade, cursing as he went the foolish whi of women, who, for no reason whatever, preferr a weak and timid child to a brave, strong, full gro man, when all of a sudden, at some few paces behi him, he heard a crackling among the leaves. turned and the first thing he could distinguish the darkness was the glowing light in a pair of ey which shone like live coals. Then, looking mo closely, and forcing his eyes, so to speak, to penetr the gloom, he saw that a great wolf was followi him, step by step. But it was not the wolf th he had entertained in his hut; that was black, wh this was a reddish-brown. There was no mistaki one for the other, either as to colour or size. Thibault had no reason to suppose that all t wolves he came across would be animated w such benevolent feelings towards him as the fi with which he had had dealings, he grasped quarter-staff in both hands, and began twirling about to make sure he had not forgotten the kna of using it. But to his great surprise the wolf w on trotting quietly behind him, without evinci any hostile intention, pausing when he paused, a going on again when he did, only now and th giving a howl as if to summon reinforcemen Thibault was not altogether without uneasiness regards these occasional howls, and presently became aware of two other bright spots of light front of him, shining at intervals through t darkness which was growing thicker and thick Holding his stick up in readiness to hit, he w forward towards these two lights, which remain stationary, and as he did so, his foot seemed stumble against something lying across the pa

. . it was another wolf. Not pausing to reflect
ıether it might not be unwise now to attack the
st wolf, Thibault brought down his staff, giving
e fellow a violent blow on the head. The animal
tered a howl of pain, then shaking his ears like
dog that has been beaten by its master, began
ılking on in front of the shoemaker. Thibault
en turned to see what had become of the first
olf: it was still following him, still keeping step
th him. Bringing his eyes back again to the front,
now perceived that a third wolf was walking
ongside to the right, and turning instinctively to
e left, saw a fourth flanking him on that side too.
fore he had gone a mile, a dozen of the animals
d formed a circle round him. The situation was
tical, and Thibault was fully conscious of its
avity. At first he tried to sing, hoping that the
und of the human voice might frighten away the
imals; but the expedient was vain. Not a single
imal swerved from its place in the circle, which
ıs as exactly formed as if drawn with compasses.
ıen he thought he would climb up into the first
ck-leaved tree he came to, and there wait for day-
ht; but on further deliberation, he decided that
e wisest course was to try to get home, as the
olves, in spite of their number, still appeared as
ll intentioned as when there was only one. It
ould be time enough to climb up into a tree when
ey began to show signs of any change of
haviour towards him.

At the same time we are bound to add that
ibault was so disquieted in mind that he had
ıched his own door before he knew where he was;
did not at first recognise his own house. But a
ll greater surprise awaited him, for the wolves
o were in front now respectfully drew back into
o lines, sitting up on their hind legs and making
ane for him to pass along. Thibault did not waste
ne in stopping to thank them for this act of
urtesy, but dashed into the house, banging the
or to after him. Having firmly shut and bolted
e door, he pushed the great chest against it, that

it might be better able to resist any assault th
might be made upon it. Then he flung himself in
a chair, and began at length to find himself able
breathe more freely.

As soon as he was somewhat recovered, he we
and peeped through the little window that look
out on the forest. A row of gleaming eyes assur
him that far from having retired, the wolves h
arranged themselves symmetrically in file in front
his dwelling.

To anyone else the mere proximity of the anim
would have been most alarming, but Thibault, w
shortly before had been obliged to walk escort
by this terrible troop, found comfort in the thoug
that a wall, however thin, now separated him fro
his formidable companions.

Thibault lit his little iron lamp and put it on t
table; drew the scattered wood-ashes of his hear
together and threw on them a bundle of chips, a
then made a good fire, hoping that the reflecti
of the blaze would frighten away the wolves. B
Thibault's wolves were evidently wolves of a spec
sort, accustomed to fire, for they did not budge
inch from the post they had taken up. The sta
of uneasiness he was in prevented Thibault fro
sleeping, and directly dawn broke, he was able
look out and count them. They seemed, just
on the night before, to be waiting, some seate
some lying down, others sleeping or walking
and down like sentinels. But at length, as the la
star melted away, drowned in the waves of purp
light ebbing up from the east, all the wolves wi
one accord rose, and uttering the mournful ho
with which animals of darkness are wont to salu
the day, they dispersed in various directions a
disappeared. Thibault was now able to sit dov
and think over the misadventure of the previo
day, and he began by asking himself how it w
that the mistress of the Mill had not preferr
him to his cousin Landry. Was he no longer t
handsome Thibault, or had some disadvantageo
change come over his personal appearance? The

s only one way of ascertaining whether this was or not, namely, by consulting his mirror. So took down the fragment of looking-glass hang- over the chimney-piece, and carried it towards light, smiling to himself the while like a vain man. But he had hardly given the first glance himself in the mirror before he uttered a cry, f of astonishment, half of horror. True, he s still the handsome Thibault, but the one red r, thanks to the hasty wishes which had so im- dently escaped him, had now grown to a regular k of hair, of a colour and brilliancy that vied h the brightest flames upon his hearth.

His forehead grew cold with sweat. Knowing, wever, that all attempts to pluck it out or cut it would be futile, he made up his mind to make best of the matter as it stood, and in future forbear as far as possible from framing any hes. The best thing was to put out of his mind the ambitious desires that had worked so fatally him, and go back to his humble trade. So bault sat down and tried to work, but he had heart for the job. In vain he tried to remember carols he had been in the habit of singing in happier days when the beech and the birch ped themselves so quickly beneath his fingers; tools lay untouched for hours together. He dered over matters, asking himself whether it s not a miserable thing to be sweating one's rt out merely for the privilege of leading a nful and wretched existence, when, by judi- sly directing one's wishes, one might so easily in to happiness. Formerly, even the prepara- of his frugal meal had been an agreeable dis- tion, but it was so no longer; when hunger ed him and he was forced to eat his piece of k bread, he did it with a feeling of repugnance, the envy, which had hitherto been nothing e than a vague aspiration after ease and nfort, was now developed into a blind and ent hatred towards his fellow creatures.

till the day, long as it seemed to Thibault,

passed away like all its fellows. When twilig fell, he went outside and sat down on the ben which he had made himself and placed in front the door, and there he remained, lost in gloor reflections. Scarcely had the shadows begun darken, before a wolf emerged from the und wood, and, as on the previous evening, went a lay down at a short distance from the house. on the evening before, this wolf was followed a second, by a third, in short by the whole pac and once more they all took up their respecti posts preparatory to the night's watch. As so as Thibault saw the third wolf appear, he we indoors and barricaded himself in as carefully the evening before; but this evening he was ev more unhappy and low spirited, and felt that had not the strength to keep awake all night. he lighted his fire, and piled it up in such a w that it would last till the morning, and throwi himself on his bed, fell fast asleep. When awoke, it was broad daylight, the sun having ris some hours before. Its rays fell in many colou on the quivering autumn leaves, dyeing them wi a thousand shades of gold and purple.

Thibault ran to the window, the wolves had d appeared, leaving behind only the mark of whe their bodies had lain on the dew-covered grass.

Next evening they again congregated before dwelling; but he was now growing gradua accustomed to their presence, and had come to t conclusion that his relations with the large bla wolf had somehow awakened sympathetic feelin towards him in all other individuals of the sa species, and he determined to find out, once all, what their designs towards him really we Accordingly, thrusting a freshly sharpened b hook into his belt, and taking his boar-spear in hand, the shoemaker opened his door and walk resolutely out to face them. Having half expect that they would spring upon him, he was grea surprised to see them begin to wag their tails li so many dogs on seeing their master approa

eir greetings were so expressive of friendliness
t Thibault even ventured to stroke one or two
them on the back, which they not only allowed
n to do, but actually gave signs of the greatest
asure at being thus noticed.

"Oh! ho!" muttered Thibault, whose wander-
imagination always went ahead at a gallop,
f these queer friends of mine are as obedient as
y are gentle, why, here I am, the owner of a
k unequalled by any my lord Baron has ever
ssessed, and I shall have no difficulty whatever
w in dining on venison whenever the fancy so
es me."

He had hardly said the words when four of the
ongest and most alert of the four-footed beasts
arated themselves from the others and galloped
into the forest. A few minutes later a howl was
rd, sounding from the depths of the underwood,
d half an hour afterwards one of the wolves re-
peared dragging with it a fine kid which left
hind it a long trail of blood on the grass. The
lf laid the animal at Thibault's feet, who, de-
hted beyond measure at seeing his wishes, not
ly accomplished, but forestalled, broke up the
, giving each of the wolves an equal share, and
eping the back and haunches for himself. Then
h the gesture of an Emperor, which showed
t he now at last understood the position he held,
ordered the wolves away until the morrow.

Early next morning, before the day broke, he
nt off to Villers-Cotterets, and at the price of a
ple of crowns, the Innkeeper of the *Boule-d'Or*,
k the two haunches off his hands.

The following day, it was half of a boar that
ibault conveyed to the Innkeeper, and it was not
g before he became the latter's chief purveyor.
Thibault, taking a taste for this sort of business,
w passed his whole day hanging about the
erns, and gave no more thought to the making
shoes. One or two of his acquaintances began
make fun of his red lock, for however assidu-
sly he covered it with the rest of his hair, it

always found a way of getting through the cur that hid it, and making itself visible. But Thibau soon gave it plainly to be understood that he wou take no joking about the unfortunate disfigurement

Meanwhile, as ill luck would have it, the Duk of Orleans and Madame de Montesson came spend a few days at Villers-Cotterets. This wa a fresh incentive to Thibault's madly ambitio spirit. All the fine and beautiful ladies and all th gay young lords from the neighbouring estate the Montbretons, the Montesquious, the Courval hastened to Villers-Cotterets. The ladies brougl their richest attire, the young lords their mo elegant costumes. The Baron's hunting-horn r sounded through the forest louder and gayer tha ever. Graceful amazons and dashing cavaliers, i red coats laced with gold, passed like radiar visions, as they were borne along on the magnificent English horses, illuminating the sombr depths of the wood like brilliant flashes of light.

In the evening it was different; then all th aristocratic company assembled for feasting an dancing, or at other times drove out in beautift gilt carriages bedizened with coats of arms of ever colour.

Thibault always took his stand in the front ran of the lookers-on, gazing with avidity on thes clouds of satin and lace, which lifted now and the to disclose the delicate ankles encased in their fin silk stockings, and the little shoes with their re heels. Thus the whole cavalcade swept past i front of the astonished peasantry, leaving a fain exhalation of scent and powder and delicate per fumes. And then Thibault would ask himself wh he was not one of those young lords in the embroidered coats; why he had not one of the beautiful women in their rustling satins for hi mistress. Then his thoughts would turn to Agne ette and Madame Polet, and he saw them just a they were, the one a poor little peasant girl, th other nothing more than the owner of a rustic mill

But it was when he was walking home at nigh

ɔugh the forest, accompanied by his pack of ves, which, from the moment the night fell and set foot inside the forest, no more thought of ing him than the King's bodyguard would ım of leaving their Royal master, that his ɔdings took their most disastrous turn. Surıded by the temptations which now assailed him, as only what was to be expected that Thibault, had already gone so far in the direction of should break away from what little good was left in him, losing even the very remembrance aving once led an honest life. What were the paltry crowns that the landlord of the *Boule-r* gave him in payment for the game which his d friends the wolves procured for him? Saved for months, even for years, they would still be fficient to satisfy a single one of the humblest he desires which kept tormenting his brain. It ld be scarcely safe to say that Thibault, who first wished for a haunch of the Baron's buck, for Agnelette's heart, and then for the Widow t's mill, would now be satisfied even with the le at Oigny or Longpont, to such extravagant es had his ambition been excited by those ty feet, those trim ankles, those exquisite scents led from all those velvet and satin gowns.

t last one day he said to himself definitely that ould be the veriest folly to go on living his life when a power so tremendous as he now essed was at his disposal. From that moment nade up his mind that, no matter if his hair ld go as red as the crown of fire which is seen ight hanging over the great chimney at the s works of Saint-Gobain, he would exercise power of his to the accomplishing of the most -flown of his ambitions.

CHAPTER X

MAITRE MAGLOIRE

IN this reckless state of mind Thibault, who h not as yet decided on any special course action, spent the last days of the old year and first of the new. Still, remembering the hea expenses entailed on each and all by New Yea Day, he had exacted double rations from his us purveyor's as the trying time drew nearer a nearer, simultaneously, drawing double profits fr the landlord of the *Boule-d'Or*.

Thus it came about that, apart from the c quieting fact that his mesh of red hair was getti larger and larger almost every day, Thibault ente upon the New Year in a better condition as material matters than he had ever known befo Observe, I say, as to *material* matters, and mate matters only; for albeit the body might seem good plight, the soul was already alarmingly co promised. The body at any rate was well cloth and ten crowns or more made a merry jingli in his waistcoat pocket; and so dressed, and accompanied by this silvery music, Thibault longer appeared like a wooden shoemake apprentice, but like some well-to-do farmer, or ev a comfortable citizen, carrying on a trade may but simply for his own pleasure. Looking such he now did, Thibault went to one of those villa functions, which are fête-days for the wh province. The magnificent ponds of Berval a Poudron were to be drawn. Now the drawing a pond is a grand affair for the owner, or for t one who farms it, not to mention the great pleasu

ffords to the spectators. Such an event there-
e is advertised a month in advance, and people
ne from thirty miles round to enjoy this fine
ertainment. And to those of my readers who
not accustomed to the manners and customs of
provinces, let me explain that the fishing which
es place is not a fishing with the line, baited with
ms, or scented wheat, or with the cast-net, or
sweep-net, nothing of the kind; this fishing
sists in emptying a pond, sometimes nearly a
e, or even three miles long, of every fish from
largest pike to the smallest minnow. This is
the thing is managed. In all probability, not
ngle one of my readers has ever seen the kind
pond to which I refer. I will describe it; to
in with, it always has two issues, that by which
water flows in, that by which the water flows
; that by which the water enters has no par-
lar name, that by which it is let out is called
sluice. The water as it leaves the sluice falls
a large reservoir whence it escapes through
meshes of a strong net; the water flows away,
the fish remain. Everyone knows that it takes
eral days to empty a pond, therefore those who
n to take a share in the fishing, and the on-
kers, are not summoned to attend before the
nd, third, or fourth day, according to the
ume of water which the pond has to disgorge
ore it is ready for the final act, and this takes
e as soon as the fish appear at the sluice.

t the hour announced for the fishing, a crowd
embles, varying in number according to the size
the celebrity of the pond, but comparatively
arge and as fashionable as that to be seen at
Champ de Mars or Chantilly on race days when
urite horses are to run and favourite jockeys
ide. Only here the spectators do not look on
n grand-stands and carriages; on the contrary,
come as they can, or as they like, in gigs,
sure vans, phaëtons, carts, on horse-back, on
key-back; but once on the spot everyone rushes
ind a place, stationing him or herself either in

order of arrival, or according to the amount elbowing and pushing of which each is capab always, however, with that due respect for author which is observed even in the least civilised distric A sort of stout trellis-work, however, firmly su in the ground, prevents the onlookers from falli into the reservoir.

The colour and the smell of the water betok the arrival of the fish. Every kind of show has drawbacks: the larger and grander the audien at the opera house, the more carbonic acid is the to draw into the lungs; at the drawing of a pon the nearer the supreme moment approaches, t more marsh-gas is there to inhale.

When the sluice is first opened, the water th pours through is beautifully clear, and slight green in colour, like the water of a brook; this the upper layer, which, carried along by its weigh is the first to appear. By degrees the wat becomes less transparent, and takes on a greyi hue; this is the second layer, emptying itself turn, and every now and then, more frequently the water becomes muddier, a ray of silver is se to dart through it; it is some fish, too small ar weak to resist the current, which flashes past if acting as scout for its stronger brethren. N body troubles to pick it up; it is allowed to l gasping, and trying to find some little stagna puddle of water at the bottom of the pond, flappin floundering and capering like an acrobat goin through his antics.

Then the black water comes pouring throug this is the last act, the final catastrophe.

Each fish, according to its power of resistanc struggles against the current which is bearing along in this unusual manner. Instinctively the feel there is danger, and each strives its hardest t swim in an opposite direction; the pike struggle beside the carp which it was yesterday pursuin so hard; the perch is reconciled to the tench, an as they swim side by side, does not so much a think of taking a bite out of the flesh he finds s

atable at other times. So the Arabs at times
d huddled together in the pits they dig to catch
me, gazelles and jackals, antelopes and hyenas,
jackals and hyenas having grown as gentle and
id as the gazelles and antelopes.

But the strength of the struggling and dying fish
gins at last to fail. The scouts that we noticed
few minutes ago become more numerous; the
e of the fish becomes more respectable, which
proved to them by the attention they receive from
pickers-up. These pickers-up are men, clad in
in linen trousers and cotton shirts; the trousers
rolled up to above the knee, and the shirt
eves turned up to the shoulders. The fish are
thered up in baskets; those destined to be sold
ve, or kept for re-stocking the pond, are poured
into tanks; those condemned to death are simply
read out on the grass, and will be sold before the
y is out. As the fish grow more and more abun-
nt the cries of delight from the spectators become
der and more frequent; for these onlookers are
t like the audiences in our theâtres; they have
idea of stifling their feelings, or showing good
te by appearing indifferent. No, they come to
use themselves, and every fine tench, or fine
p, or fine pike, calls forth loud, undisguised and
ighted applause. As in a well-ordered review,
troops file past in order, according to their
ight, if we may use the expression, first the light
rpshooters, then the somewhat heavier dragoons,
d finally the ponderous cuirassiers and heavy
illery to bring up the rear, so the fish sweep by
cording to their several species; the smallest,
t is the weakest, first, the heaviest, that is the
ongest, last.

At last the moment comes when the water ceases
flow; the passage is literally obstructed by the
mainder of the fish, the big-wigs of the pond,
d the pickers-up have veritable monsters to fight
th. This is the supreme moment. Now comes
climax of applause, the last vociferous bravos.
en, the play being over, everyone goes to

examine the actors; the latter are mostly l gasping to death on the grass of the field, v a certain number are recovering themselves in water. You look about for the eels; where are eels you ask? Then three or four eels, abou big round as your thumb and half the length of y arm, are pointed out to you; for the eels, tha to their peculiar organisation, have moment at least escaped the general carnage. The have taken a header into the mud and disappea and this is the reason why you may see men guns walking up and down at the edge of the po and hear a report from time to time. If you the reason for this shooting, you will be told it is to bring the eels out of their hiding-pla But why do eels come out of the mud when t hear the report of a gun? Why do they make the water which still runs in little rivulets at bottom of the pond? Why, in short, being s at the bottom of the mud, like other good frie of our acquaintance who have the good sense remain there, do the eels not stay there, inst of wriggling back into a stream of water wh carries them along with it, and finally lands th in the reservoir, that is in the common gra The *Collège de France* would find nothing ea than to answer this question, under existing cumstances; so I put this question to its lear members: Is not the idea of the gun a pure sup stition, and is not the following solution the ri and simple one? The mud in which the eel ta refuge is at first liquid, but gradually becomes dr and drier, like a sponge when squeezed, and becomes more and more uninhabitable for it, a so, in the long run, it is obliged to get back to natural element — the water. The water o reached, the eel is lost; but it is not till the fi or sixth day after the emptying of the pond th the eels are caught.

It was to a fête of this kind that everyone Villers-Cotterets, at Crespy, at Mont-Gobert, a in the surrounding villages had been invite

ibault went like everybody else; he had now no ed to work, finding it simpler to allow the wolves work for him. From a workman he had risen be a man at ease, it now only remained to make nself a gentleman, and Thibault counted upon ing able to do this. He was not a man to allow nself to remain in the rear, and he therefore made od use of his arms and legs so as to secure a ce in the front row. In the course of this nœuvre he happened to rumple the dress of a l, fine woman, next to whom he was trying to stal himself. The lady was fond of her clothes, d no doubt, also, she was in the habit of com-nding, which naturally produces an attitude of sdain, for, turning to see who had brushed her, e let fall the uncompromising word, "lout!" otwithstanding the rudeness of the remark, the outh that uttered the words was so beautiful, the dy so pretty, and her momentary anger in such ly contrast to the charming expression of her ce, that Thibault, instead of retorting in similar, even more objectionable style, only drew back, ammering some sort of excuse.

There is no need to remind the reader that of all istocracies, beauty is still the chief. If the oman had been old and ugly, she might have been Marquise, but Thibault would certainly have lled her by some opprobrious title. It is possible so that Thibault's ideas were somewhat distracted y the strange appearance of the man who served knight to this lady. He was a stout man of out sixty years of age, dressed entirely in black, d of a perfectly dazzling exactness of toilet; but erewith, so extremely short, that his head scarcely ached the lady's elbow, and as she would have een unable to take his arm, without positive rture to herself, she was content to lean ajestically upon his shoulder. Seeing them thus gether, one might have taken her for an ancient ybelé, leaning on one of those grotesque little odern figures of Chinese idols. And what a ascinating idol it was with those short legs, that

bulgy stomach, those little fat podgy arms, th white hands under the lace ruffles, that plu rubicund head and face, that well-combed, w powdered, well-curled head of hair, and that t pigtail, which with every movement of its weare went bobbing up and down with its neat bow ribbon against the coat collar. It reminded of those black beetles of which the legs seem little in harmony with the body, that the inse seem rather to roll than to walk. And with it the face was so jovial, the little eyes level with forehead, were so full of kindness, that one involuntarily drawn towards him; one could sure that the pleasant little man was too intent giving himself a good time, by every means in power, to think of quarrelling with that vague a indefinite person known as one's neighbo Wherefore, on hearing his companion speak cavalierly to Thibault, the good fat little m appeared to be in despair.

"Gently, Madame Magloire! gently, Mada Bailiff!" he said, contriving in these few words let his neighbours know what and who he w "gently! those were ugly words to use to the po fellow, who is more sorry than you are for t accident."

"And may I ask, Monsieur Magloire," repli the lady, "if I am not at liberty to thank him f so nicely crumpling my beautiful blue damask dre which is now entirely spoilt, not taking into co sideration that he also trod on my little toe?"

"I beg you, Madame, to pardon my clumsiness replied Thibault; "when you turned your fa towards me, its wonderful beauty dazzled me li a ray of May sunshine, so that I could not s where I was treading."

It was not a badly turned compliment for a m who for three months past had been in the dai society of a pack of wolves; nevertheless it d not produce any great effect upon the lady, wh only responded with a haughty little pouting the mouth. The truth was, that in spite of Thibau

ing so decently dressed, she had, with the curious sight which women of all ranks possess in these atters, detected at once to what class he belonged. Her stout little companion, however, was more dulgent, for he clapped loudly with his podgy nds, which the pose adopted by his wife left him ee to use as he liked.

"Ah! bravo, bravo!" he said, "you have hit e mark, Monsieur; you are a clever young fellow, d seem to have studied the style to address omen in. My love, I hope you appreciated the mpliment as I did, and to prove to this gentlein that we are good Christians and bear no illll towards him, he will, I hope, if he is living in s neighbourhood and it would not be too far t of his way, accompany us home, and we will ink a bottle of old wine together, if Perrine will t one out for us from the back of the wood ed."

"Ah! there I know you, Master Népomucène; y excuse serves you to be clinking glasses with nebody, and when no genuine occasion offers, u are very clever at ferreting out one, it does t matter where. But you know, Monsieur agloire, that the doctor has expressly forbidden u to drink between meals."

"True, Madame Bailiff, true," replied her husnd, "but he did not forbid me to show politeness an agreeable young fellow such as Monsieur pears to me to be. Be lenient, I pray, Suzanne; e up this surly manner, which suits you so ill. hy, Madame, those who do not know you, would nk, to hear you, that we had nearly got to arrelling over a gown. However, to prove the ntrary to Monsieur, I promise that if you can t him to go back with us, I will, the very minute get home, give you the money to buy that ured silk dress, which you have been wishing so long to have."

The effect of this promise was like magic. adame Magloire was instantly mollified, and as fishing was now drawing to a close, she

accepted with less ungraciousness the arm whi Thibault, somewhat awkwardly we must confe now offered her.

As to Thibault himself, struck with the beau of the lady, and gathering from words which h fallen from her and her husband, that she was t wife of a magistrate, he parted the crowd befo him with an air of command, holding his head hi the while, and making his way with as mu determination as if he were starting on the conque of the Golden Fleece.

And in truth, Thibault, the bridegroom elect Agnelette, the lover who had been so ignominious expelled her house by the mistress of the Mill, w thinking not only of all the pleasure he could enjo but of the proud position he would hold as t beloved of a bailiff's wife, and of all the advantag to be drawn from the good fortune which had unexpectedly befallen him and which he had long desired.

As on her side also, Madame Magloire was n only very much preoccupied with her own thought but also paid very little attention to him, lookin to right and left, first in front of her and th behind, as if in search of someone, the conversati would have lagged terribly as they walked alo if their excellent little companion had not been the expense of the best part of it, as he jogg along now beside Thibault and now beside Suzann waddling like a duck jogging home after a b feed.

And so with Thibault engaged in his calculation and the Bailiff's wife with her dreams, the Bail trotting beside them talking and wiping his for head with a fine cambric pocket-handkerchie they arrived at the village of Erneville, which situated about a mile and a half from the Poudr ponds. It was here, in this charming village, whi lies half-way between Haramont and Bonneu within a stone's throw or two of the Castle of Ve the dwelling of my lord the Baron, that Monsie Magloire sat as magistrate.

CHAPTER XI

DAVID AND GOLIATH

FTER walking the whole length of the village they stopped before an imposing looking use at the junction of the roads leading to ngpré and Haramont. As they neared the use, the little host, with all the gallantry of a reux chevalier" went on ahead, mounted the ht of five or six steps with an agility which e could not have expected, and, by dint of stand- on tiptoe, managed to reach the bell with the s of his fingers. It should be added, that having ce got hold of it, he gave it a pull which un- stakably announced the return of the master. was, in short, no ordinary return, but a mphal one, for the Bailiff was bringing home uest.

A maid, neatly dressed in her best clothes, opened door. The Bailiff gave her an order in a low ce, and Thibault, whose adoration of beautiful men did not prevent him from liking a good ner, gathered that these few whispered words erred to the menu which Perrine was to prepare. en turning round, his host addressed Thibault:

"Welcome, my dear guest, to the house of iliff Népomucène Magloire."

Thibault politely allowed Madame to pass in ore him, and was then introduced into the wing-room.

But the shoemaker now made a slip. Un- ustomed as yet to luxury, the man of the forest s not adroit enough to hide the admiration which felt on beholding the Bailiff's home. For the

first time in his life he found himself in the mid of damask curtains and gilt armchairs; he had n imagined that anyone save the King, or at lea his Highness the Duke of Orleans, had curtai and armchairs of this magnificence. He was u conscious that all the while Madame Magloire w closely watching him, and that his simple astonis ment and delight did not escape her detective ey However, she appeared now, after mature refle tion, to look with greater favour on the gue whom her husband had imposed upon her, a endeavoured to soften for him the glances of h dark eyes. But her affability did not go so f as to lead her to comply with the request Monsieur Magloire, who begged her to add to t flavour and bouquet of the champagne by pourin it out herself for her guest. Notwithstanding t entreaties of her august husband, the Bailiff's wi refused, and under the pretext of fatigue from h walk, she retired to her own room. Before leavin the room, however, she expressed a hope Thibault that, as she owed him some expiation, would not forget the way to Erneville, ending h speech with a smile which displayed a row of charm ing teeth. Thibault responded with so much live pleasure in his voice that it rendered any roughne of speech less noticeable, swearing that he woul sooner lose the power to eat and drink than th remembrance of a lady who was as courteous a she was beautiful.

Madame Magloire gave him a curtsey whic would have made her known as the Bailiff's wif a mile off, and left the room.

She had hardly closed the door behind her whe Monsieur Magloire went through a pirouette in he honour, which though less light, was not les significant than the caper a schoolboy execute when once he has got rid of his master.

"Ah! my dear friend," he said, "now that w are no longer hampered by a woman's presence we will have a good go at the wine! These women they are delightful at mass or at a ball; but a

ble, heaven defend me, there is nobody like the en! What do you say, old fellow?"

Perrine now came in to receive her master's ders as to what wine she was to bring up. But e gay little man was far too fastidious a judge wines to trust a woman with such a commission this. Indeed, women never show that reveren- l respect for certain old bottles which is their e, nor that delicacy of touch with which they ve to be handled. He drew Perrine down as if whisper something in her ear; instead of which gave a good sound kiss to the cheek which was ll young and fresh, and which did not blush fficiently to lead to the belief that the kiss was a velty to it.

"Well, sir," said the girl laughing, "what is "

"This is it, Perrinette, my love," said the iliff, "that I alone know the good brands, and they are many in number, you might get lost ong them, and so I am going to the cellar my- lf." And the good man disappeared trundling on his little legs, cheerful, alert and fantastic those Nuremberg toys mounted on a stand, ich you wind up with a key, and which, once set ing, turn round and round, or go first one way d then the other, till the spring has run down; e only difference being, that this dear little man emed wound up by the hand of God himself, and ve no sign of ever coming to a standstill.

Thibault was left alone. He rubbed his hands gether, congratulating himself on having chanced on such a well-to-do house, with such a beautiful fe and such an amiable husband for host and stess. Five minutes later the door again opened, d in came the Bailiff, with a bottle in either hand, d one under each arm. The two under his arms ere bottles of sparkling Sillery, of the first quality, ich, not being injured by shaking, were safe to carried in a horizontal position. The two which carried in his hands, and which he held with a spectful care that was a pleasure to behold,

were, one a bottle of very old Chambertin, th other a bottle of Hermitage.

The supper hour had now come; for it must b remembered that at the period of which we ar writing, dinner was at midday, and supper at si Moreover, it had already been dark for some tim before six o'clock, in this month of January, an whether it be six, or twelve o'clock at night, one has to eat one's meal by candle or lamp-ligh it always seems to one like supper.

The Bailiff put the bottles tenderly down on th table and rang the bell. Perrine came in.

"When will the table be ready for us, m pretty?" asked Magloire.

"Whenever Monsieur pleases," replied Perrine "I know Monsieur does not like waiting; so always have everything ready in good time."

"Go and ask Madame, then, if she is not coming tell her, Perrine, that we do not wish to sit dow without her."

Perrine left the room.

"We may as well go into the dining-room t wait," said the little host; "you must be hungry my dear friend, and when I am hungry, I like t feed my eyes before I feed my stomach."

"You seem to me to be a fine gourmand, you," said Thibault.

"Epicure, epicure, not gourmand—you must no confuse the two things. I go first, but only i order to show you the way."

And so saying, Monsieur Magloire led his gues into the dining-room.

"Ah!" he exclaimed gaily as he went in, patting his corporation, "tell me now, do you not think this girl of mine is a capital cook, fit to serve a Cardinal? Just look now at this little supper she has spread for us; quite a simple one, and yet it pleases me more, I am sure, than would have Belshazzar's feast."

"On my honour, Bailiff," said Thibault, "you are right; it is a sight to rejoice one's heart." And Thibault's eyes began to shine like carbuncles.

And yet it was, as the Bailiff described it, quite an ıpretentious little supper, but withal so appetising look upon, that it was quite surprising. At one d of the table was a fine carp, boiled in vinegar and rbs, with the roe served on either side of it on a yer of parsley, dotted about with cut carrots. The pposite end was occupied by a boar-ham, mellow-ıvoured, and deliciously reposing on a dish of inach, which lay like a green islet surrounded by an ean of gravy.

A delicate game-pie, made of two partridges only, which the heads appeared above the upper crust, if ready to attack one another with their beaks, as placed iin the middle of the table; while the tervening spaces were covered with side-dishes olding slices of Arles sausage, pieces of tunny-fish, vimming in beautiful green oil from Provence, ıchovies sliced and arranged in all kinds of strange ıd fantastic patterns on a white and yellow bed of ıopped eggs, and pats of butter that could only ıve been churned that very day. As accessories to ıese were two or three sorts of cheese, chosen from ıong those of which the chief quality is to provoke ıirst, some Reims biscuits of delightful crispness, ıd pears just fit to eat, showing that the master mself had taken the trouble to preserve them, and turn them about on the store-room shelf.

Thibault was so taken up in the contemplation of ıis little amateur supper that he scarcely heard the ıessage which Perrine brought back from her ıistress, who sent word that she had a sick-eadache, and begged to make her excuses to her uest, with the hope that she might have the pleasure f entertaining him when he next came.

The little man gave visible signs of rejoicing on earing his wife's answer, breathed loudly and lapped his hands, exclaiming:

"She has a headache! she has a headache! Come long then, sit down! sit down!" And thereupon, esides the two bottles of old Mâcon, which had lready been respectively placed within reach of the ost and guest, as vin ordinaire, between the *hors-*

d'œuvres and the dessert plates, he introduced four other bottles which he had just brought up fr the cellar.

Madame Magloire had, I think, acted not unwis in refusing to sup with these stalwart champions the table, for such was their hunger and thirst tl half the carp and the two bottles of wine disappear without a word passing between them except su exclamations as:

"Good fish! isn't it?"

"Capital!"

"Fine wine! isn't it?"

"Excellent!"

The carp and the Mâcon being consumed, th passed on to the game pie and the Chambertin, a now their tongues began to be unloosed, especial the Bailiff's.

By the time half the game pie and the first bott of Chambertin were finished, Thibault knew tl history of Népomucène Magloire; not a very cor plicated one, it must be confessed.

Monsieur Magloire was son to a church ornamei manufacturer who had worked for the chapel belon ing to his Highness, the Duke of Orleans, the latte in his religious zeal having a burning desire t obtain pictures by Albano and Titian for the su of four to five thousand francs.

Chrysostom Magloire had placed his son Népc mucène Magloire, as head cook with Louis' son, hi Highness the Duke of Orleans.

The young man had, from infancy almost, mani fested a decided taste for cooking; he had bee especially attached to the Castle at Villers-Cotterets and for thirty years presided over his Highness' dinners, the latter introducing him to his friends as a thorough artist, and from time to time, sending fo him to come upstairs to talk over culinary matters with Marshal Richelieu.

When fifty-five years of age, Magloire found himself so rounded in bulk that it was only with some difficulty he could get through the narrow doors of the passages and offices. Fearing to be caught some

y like the weasel of the fable, he asked permission resign his post.

The Duke consented, not without regret, but with s regret than he would have felt at any other time, r he had just married Madame de Montesson, and was only rarely now that he visited his castle at llers-Cotterets.

His Highness had fine old-fashioned ideas as gards superannuated retainers. He, therefore, sent r Magloire, and asked him how much he had been le to save while in his service. Magloire replied at he was happily able to retire with a competence; e Prince, however, insisted upon knowing the exact nount of his little fortune, and Magloire confessed an income of nine thousand livres.

"A man who has provided me with such a good ole for thirty years," said the Prince, "should ve enough to live well upon himself for the mainder of his life." And he made up the income twelve thousand, so that Magloire might have a ousand livres a month to spend. Added to this, he owed him to choose furniture for the whole of his use from his own old lumber-room; and thence me the damask curtains and gilt armchairs, which, hough just a little bit faded and worn, had never-eless preserved that appearance of grandeur which d made such an impression on Thibault.

By the time the whole of the first partridge was ished, and half the second bottle had been drunk, ibault knew that Madame Magloire was the host's urth wife, a fact which seemed in his own eyes to d a good foot or two to his height.

He had also ascertained that he had married her t for her fortune, but for her beauty, having ways had as great a predilection for pretty faces d beautiful statues as for good wines and appetis-g victuals, and Monsieur Magloire further stated, th no sign of faltering, that, old as he was, if his fe were to die, he should have no fear in entering a fifth marriage.

As he now passed from the Chambertin to the ermitage, which he alternated with the Sillery,

Monsieur Magloire began to speak of his wif qualities. She was not the personification of docili no, quite the reverse; she was somewhat opposed her husband's admiration for the various wines France, and did everything she could, even usi physical force, to prevent his too frequent visits the cellar; while, for one who believed in living wi out ceremony, she on her part was too fond of dre too much given to elaborate head-gears, Engli laces, and suchlike gewgaws, which women ma part of their arsenal; she would gladly have turn the twelve hogsheads of wine, which formed t staple of her husband's cellar, into lace for her arm and ribands for her throat, if Monsieur Magloire h been the man to allow this metamorphosis. Bu with this exception, there was not a virtue whi Suzanne did not possess, and these virtues of hers, the Bailiff was to be believed, were carried on perfectly shaped a pair of legs that, if by a misfortune she were to lose one, it would be qui impossible throughout the district to find anoth that would match the leg that remained. The goo man was like a regular whale, blowing out se satisfaction from all his air-holes, as the former do sea-water. But even before all these hidden perfe tions of his wife had been revealed to him by t Bailiff, like a modern King Candaules ready confide in a modern Gyges, her beauty had alrea made such a deep impression on the shoemak that, as we have seen, he could do nothing but thi of it in silence as he walked beside her, and since had been at table, he had continued to dream about listening to his host—eating the while of course without answering, as Monsieur Magloire, delight to have such an accommodating audience, poure forth his tales, linked one to another like a neckla of beads.

But the worthy Bailiff, having made a secon excursion to the cellar, and this second excursio having produced, as the saying is, a little knot at t tip of his tongue, he began to be rather less appreci tive of the rare quality which was required

disciples by Pythagons. He, therefore, gave ibault to understand that he had now said all that wished to tell him concerning himself and his fe, and that it was Thibault's turn to give him ne information as regards his own circumstances, amiable little man adding that wishing often to it him, he wished to know more about him. ibault felt that it was very necessary to disguise truth; and accordingly gave himself out as a man ing at ease in the country, on the revenues of two ms and of a hundred acres of land, situated near rtefeuille.

There was, he continued, a splendid warren on se hundred acres, with a wonderful supply of red d fallow deer, boars, partridges, pheasants and res, of which the Bailiff should have some to taste. e Bailiff was astonished and delighted. As we ve seen, by the menu for his table, he was fond of nison, and he was carried away with joy at the ought of obtaining his game without having ourse to the poachers, and through the channel of s new friendship.

And now, the last drop of the seventh bottle ving been scrupulously divided between the two sses, they decided that it was time to stop.

The rosy champagne—prime vintage of Aï, and last bottle emptied—had brought Népomucène gloire's habitual good nature to the level of der affection. He was charmed with his new end, who tossed off his bottle in almost as good le as he did himself; he addressed him as his som friend, he embraced him, he made him promise t there should be a morrow to their pleasant ertainment; he stood a second time on tiptoe to ve him a parting hug as he accompanied him to the or, which Thibault on his part, bending down, eived with the best grace in the world.

The church clock of Erneville was striking mid-ght as the door closed behind the shoemaker. The nes of the heady wine he had been drinking had gun to give him a feeling of oppression before ving the house, but it was worse when he got into

the open air. He staggered, overcome with gid ness, and went and leant with his back against wall. What followed next was as vague a mysterious to him as the phantasmagoria of dream. Above his head, about six or eight fe from the ground, was a window, which, as he mov to lean against the wall, had appeared to him to lighted, although the light was shaded by doul curtains. He had hardly taken up his positi against the wall when he thought he heard it ope It was, he imagined, the worthy Bailiff, unwilli to part with him without sending him a last farewe and he tried to step forward so as to do honour this gracious intention, but his attempt was unava ing. At first he thought he was stuck to the w like a branch of ivy, but he was soon disabused this idea. He felt a heavy weight planted first the right shoulder and then on the left, which ma his knees give way so that he slid down the wall if to seat himself. This manœuvre on Thibault's pa appeared to be just what the individual who w making use of him as a ladder wished him to do, f we can no longer hide the fact that the weight so fe was that of a man. As Thibault made his force genuflexion, the man was also lowered; "That right, l'Eveillé! that's right!" he said, "So!" an with this last word, he jumped to the ground, whi overhead was heard the sound of a window bein shut.

Thibault had sense enough to understand tw things: first, that he was mistaken for someon called l'Eveillé, who was probably asleep somewher about the premises; secondly, that his shoulder had just served some lover as a climbing ladder both of which things caused Thibault an undefine sense of humiliation.

Accordingly, he seized hold mechanically of som floating piece of stuff which he took to be the lover' cloak, and, with the persistency of a drunken man continued to hang on to it.

"What are you doing that for, you scoundrel?" asked a voice, which did not seem altogethe

familiar with the shoemaker. "One would think u were afraid of losing me."

"Most certainly I am afraid of losing you," plied Thibault, "because I wish to know who it is s the impertinence to use my shoulders for a lder."

"Phew!" said the unknown, "it's not you then, veillé?"

"No, it is not," replied Thibault.

"Well, whether it is you or not you, I thank you."

"How, 'thank you'? Ah! I dare say! 'thank u,' indeed! You think the matter is going to rest e that, do you?"

"I had counted upon it being so, certainly."

"Then you counted without your host."

"Now, you blackguard, leave go of me! you are unk!"

"Drunk! What do you mean? We only drank ven bottles between us, and the Bailiff had a good ur to his share."

"Leave go of me, you drunkard, do you ar!"

"Drunkard! you call me a drunkard, a drunkard r having drunk three bottles of wine!"

"I don't call you a drunkard because you drank ree bottles of wine, but because you let yourself t tipsy over those three unfortunate bottles."

And, with a gesture of commiseration, and trying r the third time to release his cloak, the unknown ntinued:

"Now then, are you going to let go my cloak or t, you idiot?"

Thibault was at all times touchy as to the way ople addressed him, but in his present state of nd his susceptibility amounted to extreme itation.

"By the devil!" he exclaimed, "let me tell you, y fine sir, that the only idiot here is the man who ves insults in return for the services of which he s made use, and seeing that is so, I do not know at prevents me planting my fist in the middle of ur face."

This menace was scarcely out of his mouth wh as instantly as a cannon goes off once the flame the match has touched the powder, the blow w which Thibault had threatened his unknown adv sary came full against his own cheek.

"Take that, you beast," said the voice, wh brought back to Thibault certain recollections connection with the blow he received. "I am a gc Jew, you see, and pay you back your money bef weighing your coin."

Thibault's answer was a blow in the chest; it w well directed, and Thibault felt inwardly pleased w it himself. But it had no more effect on his antag ist than the fillip from a child's finger would have an oak tree. It was returned by a second blow the fist which so far exceeded the former in the fo with which it was delivered that Thibault felt cert if the giant's strength went on increasing in t same ratio, that a third of the kind would level h with the ground.

But the very violence of his blow brought disast on Thibault's unknown assailant. The former h fallen on to one knee, and so doing, his han touching the ground, came in contact with a stor Rising in fury to his feet again, with the stone in h hand, he flung it at his enemy's head. The coloss figure uttered a sound like the bellowing of an o turned round on himself, and then, like an oak tr cut off by the roots, fell his whole length on t ground, and lay there insensible.

Not knowing whether he had killed, or on wounded his adversary, Thibault took to his hee and fled, not even turning to look behind him.

CHAPTER XII

WOLVES IN THE SHEEP-FOLD

'HE forest was not far from the Bailiff's house, and in two bounds Thibault found himself on e further side of *Les Fossés*, and in the wooded th leading to the brickyard. He had no sooner tered the forest than his usual escort surrounded m, fawning and blinking with their eyes and wag-ng their tails to show their pleasure. Thibault, no had been so alarmed the first time he found mself in company with this strange bodyguard, ok no more notice of them now than if they had en a pack of poodles. He gave them a word or o of caress, softly scratched the head of the one at was nearest him, and continued on his way, inking over his double triumph.

He had beaten his host at the bottle, he had nquished his adversary at fisticuffs, and in this yous frame of mind, he walked along, saying aloud himself:

"You must acknowledge, friend Thibault, that u are a lucky rascal! Madame Suzanne is in every ssible respect just what you want! A Bailiff's fe! my word! that's a conquest worth making! d if he dies first, what a wife to get! But in her case, when she is walking beside me, and king my arm, whether as wife or mistress, the vil take it, if I am mistaken for anything but a ntleman! And to think that unless I am fool ough to play my cards badly, all this will be mine! or she did not deceive me by the way she went off: ose who have nothing to fear have no need to take ght. She was afraid to show her feelings too

plainly at first meeting; but how kind she was a
she got home! Well, well, it is all working it
out, as I can see; I have only got to push matter
bit; and some fine morning she will find herself
of her fat little old man, and then the thing is do
Not that I do, or can, wish for the death of p
Monsieur Magloire. If I take his place after he
no more, well and good; but to kill a man who
given you such good wine to drink! to kill him w
his good wine still hot in your mouth! why, even
friend the wolf would blush for me if I were gui
of such a deed."

Then with one of his most roguish smiles,
went on:

"And besides, would it not be as well to ha
already acquired some rights over Madame Suzan
by the time Monsieur Magloire passes, in the cou
of nature, into the other world, which, consideri
the way in which the old scamp eats and drinl
cannot be a matter of long delay?"

And then, no doubt because the good qualities
the Bailiff's wife which had been so highly extoll
to him came back to his mind:

"No, no," he continued, "no illness, no deatl
but just those ordinary disagreeables which happ
to everybody; only, as it is to be to my advantag
I should like rather more than the usual share
fall to him; one cannot at his age set up for a sma
young buck; no, every one according to the
dues . . . . and when these things come to pass,
will give you more than a thank you, Cousin Wolf

My readers will doubtless not be of the same wa
of thinking as Thibault, who saw nothing offensi
in this pleasantry of his, but on the contrary, rubbe
his hands together smiling at his own thought
and indeed so pleased with them that he had reache
the town, and found himself at the end of the Ru
de Largny before he was aware that he had left th
Bailiff's house more than a few hundred paces behin
him.

He now made a sign to his wolves, for it was no
quite prudent to traverse the whole town of Viller

ɔtterets with a dozen wolves walking alongside as a ard of honour; not only might they meet dogs by e way, but the dogs might wake up the inhabitants. Six of his wolves, therefore, went off to the right, d six to the left, and although the paths they ɔk were not exactly of the same length, and hough some of them went more quickly than the ners, the whole dozen nevertheless managed to eet, without one missing, at the end of the Rue Lormet. As soon as Thibault had reached the or of his hut, they took leave of him and appeared; but, before they dispersed, Thibault quested them to be at the same spot on the ɔrrow, as soon as night fell.

Although it was two o'clock before Thibault got me, he was up with the dawn; it is true, however, ıt the day does not rise very early in the month January.

He was hatching a plot. He had not forgotten e promise he had made to the Bailiff to send him me game from his warren; his warren being, in t, the whole of the forest-land which belonged to most serene Highness the Duke of Orleans. is was why he had got up in such good time. It d snowed for two hours before daybreak; and he w went and explored the forest in all directions, h the skill and cunning of a bloodhound.

He tracked the deer to its lair, the wild boar to soil, the hare to its form; and followed their ces to discover where they went at night.

And then, when darkness again fell on the rest, he gave a howl—a regular wolf's howl, in swer to which came crowding to him the wolves t he had invited the night before, followed by and young recruits, even to the very cubs of a ır old.

Thibault then explained that he expected a more n usually fine night's hunting from his friends, l as an encouragement to them, announced his ention of going with them himself and giving his p in the chase.

t was in very truth a hunt beyond the power of

words to describe. The whole night through the sombre glades of the forest resound with hide cries.

Here, a roebuck pursued by a wolf fell, cau by the throat by another wolf hidden in ambu there, Thibault, knife in hand like a butcher, v running to the assistance of three or four of ferocious companions, that had already fastened a fine young boar of four years old, which he n finished off.

An old she-wolf came along bringing with half-a-dozen hares which she had surprised in th love frolics, and she had great difficulty in preventi her cubs from swallowing a whole covey of you partridges which the young marauders had co across with their heads under their wings, with first waiting for the wolf-master to levy his dues

Madame Suzanne Magloire little thought w was taking place at this moment in the forest Villers-Cotterets, and on her account.

In a couple of hours' time the wolves had hea up a perfect cart-load of game in front of Thibau hut.

Thibault selected what he wanted for his o purposes, and left over sufficient to provide them sumptuous repast. Borrowing a mule from charcoal-burner, on the pretext that he wanted convey his shoes to town, he loaded it up with game and started for Villers-Cotterets. There sold a part of this booty to the game dealer, reservi the best pieces and those which had been le mutilated by the wolves' claws, to present Madame Magloire.

His first intention had been to go in person w his gift to the Bailiff; but Thibault was beginn to have a smattering of the ways of the world, a thought it would, therefore, be more becoming allow his offering of game to precede him. To t end he employed a peasant on payment of a f coppers, to carry the game to the Bailiff of Ernevi merely accompanying it with a slip of paper, which he wrote: "From Monsieur Thibault

e, himself, was to follow closely on the message; d, indeed, so closely did he do so, that he arrived st as Maître Magloire was having the game he had ceived spread out on a table.

The Bailiff, in the warmth of his gratitude, tended his arms towards his friend of the previous ght, and tried to embrace him, uttering loud cries joy. I say *tried*, for two things prevented him m carrying out his wish; one, the shortness of arms, the other, the rotundity of his person.

But thinking that where his capacities were ufficient, Madame Magloire might be of assist-ce, he ran to the door, calling at the top of his ce: "Suzanne, Suzanne!"

There was so unusual a tone in the Bailiff's voice t his wife felt sure something extraordinary had pened, but whether for good or ill she was unable make sure: and downstairs she came, therefore, great haste, to see for herself what was taking ce.

She found her husband, wild with delight, trotting nd to look on all sides at the game spread on table, and it must be confessed, that no sight ld have more greatly rejoiced a gourmand's eye. soon as he caught sight of Suzanne, "Look, k, Madame!" he cried, clapping his hands ether. "See what our friend Thibault has ught us, and thank him for it. Praise be to d! there is one person who knows how to keep promises! He tells us he will send a hamper of ne, and he sends us a cart-load. Shake hands h him, embrace him at once, and just look here this."

Madame Magloire graciously followed out her band's orders; she gave Thibault her hand, wed him to kiss her, and cast her beautiful eyes r the supply of food which elicited such exclama-s of admiration from the Bailiff. And as a ply, which was to make such an acceptable ition to the ordinary daily fare, it was certainly thy of all admiration.

irst, as prime pieces, came a boar's head and ham,

firm and savoury morsels; then a fine three year
kid, which should have been as tender as the c
that only the evening before beaded the grass
which it was nibbling; next came hares, fine fle
hares from the heath of Gondreville, full fed
wild thyme; and then such scented pheasants,
such delicious red-legged partridges, that once on
spit, the magnificence of their plumage was forgot
in the perfume of their flesh. And all these g
things the fat little man enjoyed in advance
his imagination; he already saw the boar broi
on the coals, the kid dressed with *sauce piquan*
the hares made into a pasty, the pheasants stu
with truffles, the partridges dressed with cabba
and he put so much fervour and feeling into
orders and directions that merely to hear him
enough to set a gourmand's mouth watering.

It was this enthusiasm on the part of the Ba
which no doubt made Madame Suzanne app
somewhat cold and unappreciative in comparis
Nevertheless she took the initiative, and with m
graciousness assured Thibault that she would
no account allow him to return to his farms u
all the provisions, with which, thanks to him,
larder would now overflow, had been consum
You may guess how delighted Thibault was
having his cherished wishes thus met by Mada
herself. He promised himself no end of gra
things from this stay at Erneville, and his spi
rose to the point of himself proposing to Ma
Magloire that they should indulge in a preparat
whack of liquor to prepare their digestions for
savoury dishes that Mademoiselle Perrine
preparing for them.

Maître Magloire was quite gratified to see t
Thibault had forgotten nothing, not even the coo
name. He sent for some vermouth, a liqueur
yet but little known in France, having be
imported from Holland by the Duke of Orleans a
of which a present had been made by his Highnes
head cook to his predecessor.

Thibault made a face over it; he did not thi

s foreign drink was equal to a nice little glass native Châblis; but when assured by the Bailiff t, thanks to the beverage, he would in an hour's e have a ferocious appetite, he made no further nark, and affably assisted his host to finish the tle. Madame Suzanne, meanwhile, had returned her own room to smarten herself up a bit, as nen say, which generally means an entire change raiment.

t was not long before the dinner-hour sounded, Madame Suzanne came down stairs again. was perfectly dazzling in a splendid dress of y damask trimmed with pearl, and the transports amorous admiration into which Thibault was own by the sight of her prevented the shoe ker from thinking of the awkwardness of the ition in which he now unavoidably found him-, dining as he was for the first time with such dsome and distinguished company. To his credit, it said, he did not make bad use of his ortunities. Not only did he cast frequent and nistakable sheep's eyes at his fair hostess, but he dually brought his knee nearer to hers, and finally t so far as to give it a gentle pressure. Suddenly, while Thibault was engaged in this performance, dame Suzanne, who was looking sweetly towards , opened her eyes and stared fixedly a moment. n she opened her mouth, and went off into such iolent fit of laughter that she almost choked, nearly went into hysterics. Maître Magloire, ng no notice of the effect, turned straight to the se, and he now looked at Thibault, and was much e concerned and alarmed with what he thought to than with the nervous state of excitement into ch his wife had been thrown by her hilarity.

Ah! my dear fellow! " he cried, stretching two e agitated arms towards Thibault, " you are in es, you are in flames! "

hibault sprang up hastily.

Where? How? " he asked.

Your hair is on fire," answered the Bailiff, in sincerity; and so genuine was his terror, that

he seized the water bottle that was in front of wife in order to put out the conflagration blazi among Thibault's locks.

The shoemaker involuntarily put up his hand his head, but feeling no heat, he at once guess what was the matter, and fell back into his cha turning horribly pale. He had been so p occupied during the last two days that he had qu forgotten to take the same precaution he had dc before visiting the owner of the mill, and h omitted to give his hair that particular twist where he was able to hide the hairs of which the black w had acquired the proprietorship under his othe Added to this, he had during this short period giv vent to so many little wishes, one here, and o there, all more or less to the detriment of neighbour, that the flame-coloured hairs had mu plied to an alarming extent, and at this mome any one of them could vie in brilliancy with t light from the two wax candles which lit the roo

"Well, you did give me a dreadful frig Monsieur Magloire," said Thibault, trying conceal his agitation.

"But, but . . . " responded the Bailiff, s pointing with some remains of fear at Thibaul flaming lock of hair.

"That is nothing," continued Thibault, "do n be uneasy about the unusual colour of some of r hair; it came from a fright my mother had with pan of hot coals, that nearly set her hair on fi before I was born."

"But what is more strange still," said Madar Suzanne, who had swallowed a whole glassful water in the effort to control her laughter, "th I have remarked this dazzling peculiarity for t first time to-day."

"Ah! really!" said Thibault, scarcely knowi what to say in answer.

"The other day," continued Madame Suzann "it seemed to me that your hair was as black my velvet mantle, and yet, believe me, I did not f to study you most attentively, Monsieur Thibault.

This last sentence, reviving Thibault's hopes, tored him once more to good humour.

"Ah! Madame," he replied, "you know the verb: 'Red hair, warm heart,' and the other: ome folks are like ill-made sabots—smooth out-e, but rough to wear?'"

Madame Magloire made a face at this low proverb ut wooden shoes, but, as was not often the case h the Bailiff, he did not agree with his wife on point.

"My friend Thibault utters words of gold," he l, "and I need not go far to be able to point truth of his proverbs. . . . See for example, soup we have here, which has nothing much its appearance to commend it, but never have I nd onion and bread fried in goose-fat more to my e."

nd after this there was no further talk of bault's fiery head. Nevertheless, it seemed as Madame Suzanne's eyes were irresistibly attracted this unfortunate lock, and every time that bault's eyes met the mocking look in hers, he ught he detected on her face a reminiscence of laugh which had not long since made him feel uncomfortable. He was very much annoyed at , and, in spite of himself, he kept putting up his d to try and hide the unfortunate lock under the of his hair. But the hairs were not only un-al in colour, but also of a phenomenal stiffness—as no longer human hair, but horse-hair. In Thibault endeavoured to hide the devil's hairs eath his own, nothing, not even the hair-dresser's gs could have induced them to lie otherwise than he way which seemed natural to them. But ough so occupied with thinking of his hair, bault's legs still continued their tender man-res; and although Madame Magloire made no onse to their solicitations, she apparently had no to escape from them, and Thibault was pre-ptuously led to believe that he had achieved a quest.

hey sat on pretty late into the night, and

Madame Suzanne, who appeared to find the eveni drag, rose several times from the table and we backwards and forwards to other parts of the hou which afforded the Bailiff opportunities of freque visits to the cellar.

He hid so many bottles in the lining of waistcoat, and once on the table, he emptied th so rapidly, that little by little his head sank low and lower onto his chest, and it was eviden high time to put an end to the bout, if he was be saved from falling under the table.

Thibault decided to profit by this condition things, and to declare his love to the Bailiff's w without delay, judging it a good opportunity speak while the husband was heavy with drink; therefore expressed a wish to retire for the nig Whereupon they rose from table, and Perrine w called and bidden to show the guest to his roo As he followed her along the corridor, he ma enquiries of her concerning the different rooms.

Number one was Maître Magloire's, number t that of his wife, and number three was his. T Bailiff's room, and his wife's, communicated w one another by an inner door; Thibault's room h access to the corridor only.

He also noticed that Madame Suzanne was in h husband's room; no doubt some pious sense conjugal duty had taken her there. The good m was in a condition approaching to that of No when his sons took occasion to insult him, a Madame Suzanne's assistance would seem to ha been needed to get him into his room.

Thibault left his own room on tiptoe, carefu shut his door behind him, listened for a mome at the door of Madame Suzanne's room, heard sound within, felt for the key, found it in the loc paused a second, and then turned it.

The door opened; the room was in total darkne But having for so long consorted with wolve Thibault had acquired some of their characteristic and, among others, that of being able to see in t dark.

He cast a rapid glance round the room; to the ght was the fireplace; facing it a couch with a ge mirror above it; behind him, on the side of the eplace, a large bed, hung with figured silk; in nt of him, near the couch, a dressing-table covered th a profusion of lace, and, last of all, two large ped windows. He hid himself behind the curtains one of these, instinctively choosing the window t was farthest removed from the husband's room. ter waiting a quarter of an hour, during which e Thibault's heart beat so violently that the sound it, fatal omen! reminded him of the click-clack the mill-wheel at Croyolles, Madame Suzanne ered the room.

Thibault's original plan had been to leave his ing-place as soon as Madame Suzanne came in l the door was safely shut behind her, and there l then to make avowal of his love. But on con- eration, fearing that in her surprise, and before recognised who it was, she might not be able suppress a cry which would betray them, he ided that it would be better to wait until Monsieur gloire was asleep beyond all power of being akened.

Perhaps, also, this procrastination may have been tly due to that feeling which all men have, how- r resolute of purpose they may be, of wishing to off the critical moment, when on this moment end such chances as hung on the one which was decide for or against the happiness of the shoe- ker. For Thibault, by dint of telling himself that was madly in love with Madame Magloire, had ed by believing that he really was so, and, in e of being under the protection of the black f, he experienced all the timidity of the genuine er. So he kept himself concealed behind the tains.

The Bailiff's wife, however, had taken up her ition before the mirror of her Pompadour table, was decking herself out as if she were going to estival or preparing to take part in a procession. he tried on ten veils before making choice of one.

She arranged the folds of her dress.

She fastened a triple row of pearls round her ne

Then she loaded her arms with all the bracelets possessed.

Finally she dressed her hair with the minu care.

Thibault was lost in conjectures as to the mean of all this coquetry, when all of a sudden a c grating noise, as of some hard body coming contact with a pane of glass, made him st Madame Suzanne started too, and immediately out the lights. The shoemaker then heard her s softly to the window, and cautiously open it; wh upon there followed some whisperings, of wh Thibault could not catch the words, but, by draw the curtain a little aside, he was able to distingu in the darkness the figure of a man of giga stature, who appeared to be climbing through window.

Thibault instantly recalled his adventure with unknown combatant, whose mantle he had clung and whom he had so triumphantly disposed of hitting him on the forehead with a stone. As fa he could make out, this would be the same winc from which the giant had descended when he m use of Thibault's two shoulders as a ladder. surmise of identity was, undoubtedly, founded c logical conclusion. As a man was now climbin at the window, a man could very well have b climbing down from it; and if a man did climb d from it—unless, of course, Madame Magloi acquaintances were many in number, and she ha great variety of tastes—if a man did climb down f it, in all probability, it was the same man who this moment was climbing in.

But whoever this nocturnal visitor might Madame Suzanne held out her hand to the intru who took a heavy jump into the room, which m the floor tremble and set all the furniture shak The apparition was certainly not a spirit, bu corporeal body, and moreover one that came u the category of heavy bodies.

'Oh! take care, my lord," Madame Suzanne's ce was heard to say, "heavily as my husband ps, if you make such a noise as that, you will ke him up."

"By the devil and his horns! my fair friend," lied the stranger. "I cannot alight like a bird!"

Thibault recognised the voice as that of the man h whom he had had the altercation a night or two ore. "Albeit while I was waiting under your dow for the happy moment, my heart was so sick h longing that I felt as if wings must grow ere g, to bear me up into this dear wished-for little m."

And I too, my lord," replied Madame Magloire h a simper, "I too was troubled to leave you side to freeze in the cold wind, but the guest who s with us this evening only left us half an hour ."

And what have you been doing, my dear one, ing this last half-hour?"

I was obliged to help Monsieur Magloire, my l, and to make sure that he would not come and rrupt us."

You were right as you always are, my heart's e."

My lord is too kind," replied Suzanne—or, more rectly, tried to reply, for her last words were rrupted as if by some foreign body being placed n her lips, which prevented her from finishing the tence; and at the same moment, Thibault heard a nd which was remarkably like that of a kiss. The tched man was beginning to understand the ent of the disappointment of which he was again victim. His reflections were interrupted by the e of the newcomer, who coughed two or three es.

Suppose we shut the window, my love," said the e, after this preliminary coughing.

Oh! my lord, forgive me," said Madame gloire, "it ought to have been closed before." l so saying she went to the window, which she shut close, and then closed even more hermeti-

cally by drawing the curtains across it. T stranger meanwhile, who made himself thoroug at home, had drawn an easy-chair up to the fire, a sat with his legs stretched out, warming his feet the most luxurious fashion. Reflecting no dou that for a man half frozen, the most immedi necessity is to thaw himself, Madame Suzan seemed to find no cause of offence in this behavi on the part of her aristocratic lover, but came up his chair and leant her pretty arms over the back the most fascinating posture. Thibault had a go view of the group from behind, well thrown up the light of the fire, and he was overcome w inward rage. The stranger appeared for a while have no thought beyond that of warming hims but at last the fire having performed its appoin task, he asked:

"And this stranger, this guest of yours, who w he?"

"Ah! my lord!" answered Madame Maglo "you already know him I think only too well."

"What!" said the favoured lover, "do you me to say it was that drunken lout of the other nig again?"

"The very same, my lord."

"Well, all I can say is—if ever I get him i my grip again! . . ."

"My lord," responded Suzanne, in a voice as s as music, "you must not harbour evil desi against your enemies; on the contrary, you m forgive them as we are taught to do by our H Religion."

"There is also another religion which teac that, my dearest love, one of which you are the supreme goddess, and I but a humble neophyte. . And I am wrong in wishing evil to the scound for it was owing to the treacherous and cowar way in which he attacked and did for me that I l the opportunity I had so long wished for, of bei introduced into this house. The lucky blow on forehead with his stone made me faint; and becau you saw I had fainted, you called your husband

s on account of your husband finding me without
sciousness beneath your window, and believing
had been set upon by thieves, that he had me
ried indoors; and lastly, because you were so
ved by pity at the thought of what I had suffered
you that you were willing to let me in here.
d so, this good-for-nothing fellow, this contemp-
e scamp, is after all the source of all good, for
the good of life for me is in your love; neverthe-
; if ever he comes within reach of my whip, he will
have a very pleasant time of it."

' It seems then," muttered Thibault, swearing to
self, " that my wish has again turned to the
antage of someone else! Ah! my friend, black
lf, I have still something to learn, but, confound
ll! I will in future think so well over my wishes
ore expressing them that the pupil will become
ster . . . but to whom does that voice, that I seem
know, belong? " Thibault continued, trying to
all it, " for the voice is familiar to me, of that I
certain! "

' You would be even more incensed against him,
or wretch, if I were to tell you something."

' And what is that, my love? "

' Well, that good-for-nothing fellow, as you call
n, is making love to me."

' Phew! "

'That is so, my lord," said Madame Suzanne,
ghing.

' What! that boor, that low rascal! Where is
? Where does he hide himself? By Beelzebub!
throw him to my dogs to eat! "

And then, all at once, Thibault recognised his
n. " Ah! my lord Baron," he muttered, " it's
n, is it? "

' Pray do not trouble yourself about it, my lord,"
d Madame Suzanne, laying her two hands on her
er's shoulders, and obliging him to sit down
ain, " your lordship is the only person whom I
e, and even were it not so, a man with a lock of
l hair right in the middle of his forehead is not
one to whom I should give away my heart."

And as the recollection of this lock of hair, wl had made her laugh so at dinner, came back to l she again gave way to her amusement.

A violent feeling of anger towards the Bail wife took possession of Thibault.

"Ah! traitress!" he exclaimed to hims "what would I not give for your husband, y good, upright husband, to walk in at this mom and surprise you."

Scarcely was the wish uttered when the door communication between Suzanne's room and that Monsieur Magloire was thrown wide open, and walked her husband with an enormous night-cap his head, which made him look nearly five feet hi and holding a lighted candle in his hand.

"Ah! ah!" muttered Thibault. "Well do It's my turn to laugh now, Madame Magloire."

CHAPTER XIII

ERE IT IS DEMONSTRATED THAT A WOMAN NEVER SPEAKS MORE ELOQUENTLY THAN WHEN SHE HOLDS HER TONGUE

S Thibault was talking to himself he did not catch the few hurried words which Suzanne ispered to the Baron; and all he saw was that she peared to totter, and then fell back into her lover's ns, as if in a dead faint.

The Bailiff stopped short as he caught sight of s curious group, lit up by his candle. He was ing Thibault, and the latter endeavoured to read Monsieur Magloire's face what was passing in mind.

But the Bailiff's jovial physiognomy was not de by nature to express any strong emotion, and ibault could detect nothing in it but a benevo- t astonishment on the part of the amiable sband.

The Baron, also, evidently detected nothing re, for with a coolness and ease of manner, ich produced on Thibault a surprise beyond pression, he turned to the Bailiff, and asked:

"Well, friend Magloire, and how do you carry ur wine this evening?"

"Why, is it you, my lord?" replied the Bailiff ening his fat little eyes. "Ah! pray excuse me, l believe me, had I known I was to have the honour seeing you here, I should not have allowed myself appear in such an unsuitable costume."

"Pooh, pooh! nonsense!"

"Yes, indeed, my lord; you must permit me to and make a little toilet."

"No ceremony, I pray!" rejoined the Bar
"After curfew, one is at least free to receive o
friends in what costume one likes. Besides,
dear friend, there is something which requires m
immediate attention."

"What is that, my lord?"

"To restore Madame Magloire to her sen
who, you see, has fainted in my arms."

"Fainted! Suzanne fainted! Ah! my Goo
cried the little man, putting down his candle on
chimney-piece, "how ever did such a misfort
happen?"

"Wait, wait, Monsieur Magloire!" said
lord, "we must first get your wife into a m
comfortable position in an armchair; nothing ann
women so much as not to be at their ease when t
are unfortunate enough to faint."

"You are right, my lord; let us first put her
the armchair . . . Oh Suzanne! poor Suzan
How can such a thing as this have happened?"

"I pray you at least, my dear fellow, not to th
any ill of me at finding me in your house at suc
time of night!"

"Far from it, my lord," replied the Bailiff, "
friendship with which you honour us, and the vir
of Madame Magloire are sufficient guarantees
me to be glad at any hour to have my ho
honoured by your presence."

"Triple dyed idiot!" muttered the shoemak
"unless I ought rather to call him a doubly cle
dissembler. . . . No matter which, however!
have yet to see how my lord is going to get out
it."

"Nevertheless," continued Maître Magloi
dipping a handkerchief into some aromatic wat
and bathing his wife's temples with it, "nevert
less, I am curious to know how my poor wife
have received such a shock."

"It's a simple affair enough, as I will expla
my dear fellow. I was returning from dining w
my friend, de Vivières, and passing through Er
ville on my way to Vez, I caught sight of an op

ndow, and a woman inside making signals of tress."

'Ah! my God!"

'That is what I exclaimed, when I realized that window belonged to your house; and can it be friend the Bailiff's wife, I thought, who is in nger and in need of help?"

'You are good indeed, my lord," said the Bailiff ite overcome. "I trust it was nothing of the t."

'On the contrary, my dear man."

'How! on the contrary?"

'Yes, as you will see."

'You make me shudder, my lord! And do you an that my wife was in need of help and did not l me?"

'It had been her first thought to call you, but abstained from doing so, for, and here you see delicacy of feeling, she was afraid that if you ne, your precious life might be endangered."

The Bailiff turned pale and gave an exclamation.

'My precious life, as you are good enough to l it, is in danger?"

'Not now, since I am here."

'But tell me, I pray, my lord, what had happened? vould question my wife, but as you see she is not able to answer."

'And am I not here to answer in her stead?"

'Answer then, my lord, as you are kind enough offer to do so; I am listening."

The Baron made a gesture of assent, and went :

'So I ran to her, and seeing her all trembling d alarmed, I asked, 'What is the matter, Madame gloire, and what is causing you so much rm?' 'Ah! my lord,' she replied, 'just think at I feel, when I tell you that yesterday and day, my husband has been entertaining a man out whom I have the worst suspicions. Ugh! man who has introduced himself under the tence of friendship to my dear Magloire, and ually makes love to me, to me . . ."

"She told you that?"

"Word for word, my dear fellow! She can hear what we are saying, I hope?"

"How can she, when she is insensible?"

"Well, ask her yourself when she comes to, if she does not tell you exactly to the letter wha have been telling you, call me a Turk, an infidel a heretic."

"Ah! these men! these men!" murmured Bailiff.

"Yes, race of vipers!" continued my lord Vez, "do you wish me to go on?"

"Yes, indeed!" said the little man, forgett the scantiness of his attire in the interest excited him by the Baron's tale.

"'But, Madame,' I said to my friend Mada Magloire, 'How could you tell that he had audacity to love you?'"

"Yes," put in the Bailiff, "how did she find out? I never noticed anything myself."

"You would have been aware of it, my d friend, if only you had looked under the table; b fond of your dinner as you are, you were not lik to be looking at the dishes on the table and und neath it at the same time."

"The truth is, my lord, we had the most perf little supper! just you think now—cutlets of you wild-boar . . ."

"Very well," said the Baron, "now you a going to tell me about your supper, instead listening to the end of my tale, a tale which concer the life and honour of your wife!"

"True, true, my poor Suzanne! My lord, he me to open her hands, that I may slap them on t palms."

The lord of Vez gave all the assistance in h power to Monsieur Magloire, and by dint of the united efforts they forced open Madame Magloire hands.

The good man, now easier in his mind, beg slapping his wife's palms with his chubby litt hands, all the while giving his attention to t

nainder of the Baron's interesting and veracious ıry.

'Where had I got to?" he asked.

'You had got just to where my poor zanne, whom one may indeed call 'the chaste zanna . . .'"

'Yes, you may well say that!" interrupted the d of Vez.

'Indeed, I do! You had just got to where my ɔr Suzanne began to be aware. . . ."

'Ah, yes—that your guest like Paris of old was hing to make another Menelaus of you; well, n she rose from the table . . . You remember t she did so?"

'No . . . I was perhaps a little—just a little— rcome."

'Quite so! Well then she rose from table, and l it was time to retire."

'The truth is, that the last hour I heard strike ; eleven," said the jovial Bailiff.

Then the party broke up."

I don't think I left the table," said the Bailiff.

'No, but Madame Magloire and your guest did. told him which was his room, and Perrine wed him to it; after which, kind and faithful wife she is, Madame Magloire tucked you into bed, went into her own room."

Dear little Suzanne!" said the Bailiff in a voice emotion.

And it was then, when she found herself in her m, and all alone, that she got frightened; she ıt to the window and opened it; the wind, blow- into the room, put out her candle. You know ıt it is to have a sudden panic come over you, do not?"

Oh! yes," replied the Bailiff naïvely, "I am timid myself."

After that she was seized with panic, and daring to wake you, for fear any harm should e to you, she called to the first horseman saw go by—and luckily that horseman was elf."

"It was indeed fortunate, my lord."

"Was it not? . . . I ran, I made mys known."

"'Come up, my lord, come up,' she cri 'Come up quickly—I am sure there is a man in r room.'"

"Dear! dear! . . ." said the Bailiff, "you mu indeed have felt terribly frightened."

"Not at all! I thought it was only losing ti to stop and ring; I gave my horse to l'Eveillé, stood up on the saddle, climbed from that to t balcony, and, so that the man who was in the roo might not escape, I shut the window. It was ju at that moment that Madame Magloire, hearing t sound of your door opening, and overcome by su a succession of painful feelings, fell fainting in my arms."

"Ah! my lord!" said the Bailiff, "how frightf all this is that you tell me."

"And be sure, my dear friend, that I have rath softened than added to its terror; anyhow, you w hear what Madame Magloire has to tell you wh she comes to."

"See, my lord, she is beginning to move."

"That's right! burn a feather under her nose."

"A feather?"

"Yes, it is a sovran anti-spasmodic; burn feather under her nose, and she will revi instantly."

"But where shall I find a feather?" asked t Bailiff.

"Here! take this, the feather round my hat And the lord of Vez broke off a bit of the ostri feather which ornamented his hat, gave it Monsieur Magloire, who lighted it at the cand and held it smoking under his wife's nose.

The remedy was a sovran one, as the Bar had said; the effect of it was instantaneous; Ma ame Magloire sneezed.

"Ah!" cried the Bailiff delightedly, "now she coming to! my wife! my dear wife! my dear litt wife!"

Madame Magloire gave a sigh.

"My lord! my lord!" cried the Bailiff, "she is ved! saved!"

Madame Magloire opened her eyes, looked first the Bailiff and then at the Baron, with a be-ldered gaze, and then finally fixing them on the iliff:

"Magloire! dear Magloire!" she said, "is it ally you? Oh! how glad I am to see you again ter the bad dream I have had!"

"Well!" muttered Thibault, "she *is* a brazen-ced huzzy, if you like! if I do not get all that I int from the ladies I run after, they, at least, ord me some valuable object lessons by the y!"

"Alas! my beautiful Suzanne," said the Bailiff, it is no bad dream you have had, but, as it seems, hideous reality."

"Ah! I remember now," responded Madame agloire. Then, as if noticing for the first time at the lord of Vez was there:

"Ah! my lord," she continued, "I hope you ve repeated nothing to my husband of all those olish things I told you?"

"And why not, dear lady?" asked the Baron.

"Because an honest woman knows how to protect rself, and has no need to keep on telling her sband a lot of nonsense like that."

"On the contrary, Madame," replied the Baron. I have told my friend everything."

"Do you mean that you have told him that ring the whole of supper time that man was ndling my knee under the table?"

"I told him that, certainly."

"Oh! the wretch!" exclaimed the Bailiff.

"And that when I stooped to pick up my table pkin, it was not that, but his hand, that I came ross."

"I have hidden nothing from my friend Magloire."

"Oh! the ruffian!" cried the Bailiff.

"And that Monsieur Magloire having a passing ddiness which made him shut his eyes while at

table, his guest took the opportunity to kiss against my will? "

"I thought it was right for a husband to kn everything."

"Oh! the knave!" cried the Bailiff.

"And did you even go so far as to tell him th having come into my room, and the wind havi blown out the candle, I fancied I saw the windo curtains move, which made me call to you for he believing that he was hidden behind them?"

"No, I did not tell him that! I was going to wh you sneezed."

"Oh! the vile rascal!" roared the Bailiff, taki hold of the Baron's sword which the latter h laid on a chair, and drawing it out of the scabbar then, running toward the window which his wi had indicated, "He had better not be behind the curtains, or I will spit him like a woodcock," a with this he gave one or two lunges with the swo against the window hangings.

But all at once the Bailiff stayed his hand, a stood as if arrested like a schoolboy caught tre passing out of bounds; his hair rose on end benea his cotton night-cap, and this conjugal head-dre became agitated as by some convulsive movemen The sword dropped from his trembling hand, a fell with a clatter on the floor. He had caught sig of Thibault behind the curtains, and as Haml kills Polonius, thinking to slay his father's murdere so he, believing that he was thrusting at nothin had nearly killed his crony of the night before, wh had already had time enough to prove himself false friend. Moreover as he had lifted the curtai with the point of the sword, the Bailiff was not th only one who had seen Thibault. His wife an the Lord of Vez had both been participators in th unexpected vision, and both uttered a cry of surprise In telling their tale so well, they had had no ide that they were so near the truth. The Baron, too had not only seen that there was a man, but ha also recognised that the man was Thibault.

"Damn me!" he exclaimed, as he went neare

him, "if I mistake not, this is my old acquaint-
e, the man with the boar-spear!"

'How! how! man with the boar-spear?" asked
Bailiff, his teeth chattering as he spoke. "Any-
y I trust he has not his boar-spear with him
w!" And he ran behind his wife for protection.

No, no, do not be alarmed," said the lord of
z, "even if he has got it with him, I promise you
shall not stay long in his hands. So, master
acher," he went on, addressing himself to
ibault, "you are not content to hunt the game
onging to his Highness the Duke of Orleans, in
forest of Villers-Cotterets, but you must come
d make excursions in the open and poach on the
ritory of my friend Maître Magloire?"

'A poacher! do you say?" exclaimed the Bailiff.
s not Monsieur Thibault a landowner, the
prietor of farms, living in his country house
the income from his estate of a hundred
es?"

'What, he?" said the Baron, bursting into a
d guffaw, "so he made you believe all that stuff,
he? the rascal has got a clever tongue. He! a
downer! that poor starveling! why, the only
perty he possesses is what my stable-boys wear
their feet—the wooden shoes he gets his living
making."

Madame Suzanne, on hearing Thibault thus class-
d, made a gesture of scorn and contempt, while
aître Magloire drew back a step, while the colour
unted to his face. Not that the good little man
s proud, but he hated all kinds of deceit; it was
t because he had clinked glasses with a shoe-
ker that he turned red, but because he had drunk
company with a liar and a traitor.

During this avalanche of abuse Thibault had stood
movable with his arms folded and a smile on his
s. He had no fear but that when his turn came
speak, he would be able to take an easy revenge.
d the moment to speak seemed now to have come.
a light, bantering tone of voice—which showed
t he was gradually accustoming himself to con-

versing with people of a superior rank to his owi he then exclaimed; "By the Devil and his horr as you yourself remarked a little while ago, you c tell tales of other people, my lord, without mu compunction, and I fancy if everyone followed yc example, I should not be at such a loss what say as I choose to appear!"

The lord of Vez, perfectly aware, as was t Bailiff's wife, of the menace conveyed in these wor answered by looking Thibault up and down w eyes that were starting with anger.

"Oh!" said Madame Magloire, somewhat impru ently, "you will see, he is going to invent so scandalous tale about me."

"Have no fear, Madame," replied Thibault, w had quite recovered his self-possession, "you ha left me nothing to invent on that score."

"Oh! the vile wretch!" she cried, "you se I was right; he has got some malicious slander report about me; he is determined to revenge hi self because I would not return his sheep's-eyes, punish me because I was not willing to warn r husband that he was paying court to me." Duri this speech of Madame Suzanne's the lord of V had picked up his sword and advanced threatening towards Thibault. But the Bailiff threw hims between them, and held back the Baron's arm. was fortunate for Thibault that he did so, for t shoemaker did not move an inch to avoid the blo evidently prepared at the last moment to utter son terrible wish which would avert the danger from hir but the Bailiff interposing, Thibault had no need resort to this means of help.

"Gently, my lord!" said the Maître Magloir "this man is not worthy our anger. I am but plain citizen myself, but you see, I have on contempt for what he says, and I readily forgi him the way in which he has endeavoured to abu my hospitality."

Madame Magloire now thought that her mome had come for moistening the situation of affai with her tears, and burst into loud sobs.

" Do not weep, dear wife! " said the Bailiff, with s usual kind and simple good-nature. " Of what uld this man accuse you, what could he bring ainst you? Of having deceived me? Well, I can ly say, that made as I am, I feel I still ve favours to grant you and thanks to render you r all the happy days which I owe to you. Do not ar for a moment that this apprehension of an aginary evil will alter my behaviour towards you. shall always be kind and indulgent to you, Suzanne, d as I shall never shut my heart against you, so ll I never shut my door against my friends. hen one is small and of little account it is st to submit quietly and to trust; one need ve no fear then but of cowards and evil-ers, and I am convinced, I am happy to say, at they are not so plentiful as they are thought be. And, after all, by my faith! if the bird of sfortune should fly in, by the door or by the ndow, by Saint Gregory, the patron of drinkers, ere shall be such a noise of singing, such a nking of glasses, that he will soon be obliged to out again by the way he came in! "

Before he had ended, Madame Suzanne had thrown rself at his feet, and was kissing his hands. His eech, with its mingling of sadness and philosophy, d made more impression upon her than would ve a sermon from the most eloquent of preachers. ven the lord of Vez did not remain unmoved; a ar gathered in the corner of his eye, and he lifted s finger to wipe it away, before holding out his nd to the Bailiff, saying as he did so:

" By the horn of Beelzebub! my dear friend, you ve an upright mind and a kind heart, and it would a sin indeed to bring trouble upon you; and if have ever had a thought of doing you wrong, may od forgive me for it! I can safely swear, whatever ppens, that I shall never have such another again."

While this reconciliation was taking place between e three secondary actors in this tale, the situation the fourth, that is of the principal character in was becoming more and more embarrassing.

Thibault's heart was swelling with rage a hatred; himself unaware of the rapid growth of e within him, he was fast growing, from a selfish a covetous man, into a wicked one. Suddenly, h eyes flashing, he cried aloud: "I do not know wh holds me back from putting a terrible end to this!"

On hearing this exclamation, which had all t character of a menace in it, the Baron and Suzan understood it to mean that some great and unknov and unexpected danger was hanging over ever body's heads. But the Baron was not easi intimidated, and he drew his sword for the secor time and made a movement towards Thibaul Again the Bailiff interposed.

"My lord Baron! my lord Baron!" sa Thibault in a low voice, "this is the second tin that you have, in wish at least, passed your swor through my body; twice therefore you have been murderer in thought! Take care! one can sin other ways besides sinning in deed."

"Thousand devils!" cried the Baron, besi himself with anger, "the rascal is actually readin me a moral lesson! My friend, you were wantin a little while ago to spit him like a woodcock, allo me to give him one light touch, such as the matado gives the bull, and I will answer for it, that h won't get up again in a hurry."

"I beseech you on my knees, as a favour to you humble servant, my lord," replied the Bailiff, "to le him go in peace; and deign to remember that, bein my guest, there should no hurt nor harm be don to him in this poor house of mine."

"So be it!" answered the Baron, "I shall mee him again. All kinds of bad reports are abou concerning him, and poaching is not the only harn reported of him; he has been seen and recognis running the forest along with a pack of wolves— and astonishingly tame wolves at that. It's m opinion that the scoundrel does not always spend hi midnights at home, but sits astride a broom-stic oftener than becomes a good Catholic; the owner o

: mill at Croyolles has made complaint of his zardries. However, we will not talk of it any more w; I shall have his hut searched, and if everything re is not as it should be, the wizard's hole shall destroyed, for I will not allow it to remain on his ghness's territory. And now, take yourself off, l that quickly! "

The shoemaker's exasperation had come to a ch during this menacing tirade from the Baron; , nevertheless, he profited by the passage that s cleared for him, and went out of the room. anks to his faculty of being able to see in the k, he walked straight to the door, opened it, l passed over the threshold of the house, where had left behind so many fond hopes, now lost ever, slamming the door after him with such lence that the whole house shook. He was iged to call to mind the useless expenditure of hes and hair of the preceding evening to keep nself from asking that the whole house, and all hin it, might be devoured by the flames. He ked on for ten minutes before he became scious that it was pouring with rain—but the n, frozen as it was, and even because it was so erly cold, seemed to do Thibault good. As the od Magloire had artlessly remarked, his head was fire.

On leaving the Bailiff's house, Thibault had taken first road he came to; he had no wish to go one direction more than another, all he wanted s space, fresh air and movement. His desultory king brought him first of all onto the Value ds; but even then he did not notice where he s until he saw the mill of Croyolles in the ance. He muttered a curse against its fair owner he passed, rushed on like a madman between ciennes and Croyolles, and seeing a dark mass ront of him, plunged into its depths. This dark ss was the forest.

The forest-path to the rear of Ham, which leads m Croyolles to Préciamont, was now ahead of , and into this he turned, guided solely by chance.

CHAPTER XIV

A VILLAGE WEDDING

HE had made but a few steps within the fore when he found himself surrounded by wolves. He was pleased to see them again; slackened his pace; he called to them; and the wol came crowding round him. Thibault caressed th as a shepherd might his sheep, as a keeper of t hounds his dogs. They were his flock, his hunti pack; a flock with flaming eyes, a pack with lo of fire. Overhead, among the bare branches, t screech-owls were hopping and fluttering, maki their plaintive calls, while the other owls utte their melancholy cries in concert. The eyes of th night-birds shone like winged coals flying ab among the trees, and there was Thibault in t middle of it all, the centre of the devilish circle

Even as the wolves came up to fawn upon h and crouch at his feet, so the owls appeared to attracted towards him. The tips of their sil wings brushed against his hair; some of th alighted to perch upon his shoulder.

"Ah!" muttered Thibault, "I am not then t enemy of all created things; if men hate me, t animals love me."

He forgot what place the animals who loved h held in the chain of created beings. He did n remember that these animals which loved him w those which hated mankind, and which manki cursed.

He did not pause to reflect that these anim loved him, because he had become among men, wl

:y were among animals; a creature of the night! man of prey! With all these animals together, could not do an atom of good; but, on the other ıd, he could do a great deal of harm. Thibault iled at the thought of the harm he could do.

He was still some distance from home, and he gan to feel tired. He knew there was a large llow oak somewhere near, and he took his ırings and made for it; but he would have missed way if the wolves, who seemed to guess his ›ughts, had not guided him to it. While flocks owls hopped along from branch to branch, as if illuminate the way, the wolves trotted along in nt to show it him. The tree stood about twenty ces back from the road; it was, as I have said, old oak, numbering not years, but centuries. ees which live ten, twenty, thirty times the length a man's life, do not count their age by days and ghts, but by seasons. The autumn is their twilight, winter, their night; the spring is their dawn, summer their day. Man envies the tree, the tterfly envies man. Forty men could not have circled the trunk of the old oak with their arms.

The hollow made by time, that daily dislodged e more little piece of wood with the point of its ythe, was as large as an ordinarily sized room; but entrance to it barely allowed a man to pass ough. Thibault crept inside; there he found a rt of seat cut out of the thickness of the trunk, soft and comfortable to sit in as an arm chair. king his place in it, and bidding good night to wolves and his screech owls, he closed his eyes d fell asleep, or at least appeared to do so.

The wolves lay down in a circle round the tree; owls perched in the branches. With these lights read around its trunk, with these lights scattered out its branches, the oak had the appearance of tree lit up for some infernal revel.

It was broad daylight when Thibault awoke; the olves had long ago sought their hiding-places, the ls flown back to their ruins. The rain of the ght before had ceased, and a ray of sunlight, one

of those pale rays which are a harbinger of sprin came gliding through the naked branches of t trees, and having as yet none of the short-liv verdure of the year to shine upon, lit up the da green of the mistletoe.

From afar came a faint sound of music; gradual it grew nearer, and the notes of two violins and hautboy could be distinguished.

Thibault thought at first that he must be drea ing. But as it was broad daylight, and he appear to be in perfect possession of his senses, he w obliged to acknowledge that he was wide awak the more so, that having well rubbed his eyes make quite sure of the fact, the rustic sounds came distinctly as ever to his ear. They were drawi rapidly nearer; a bird sang, answering the music man with the music of God; and at the foot of t bush where it sat and made its song, a flower- only a snowdrop it is true—was shining like a sta The sky above was as blue as on an April da What was the meaning of this spring-like festiva now, in the heart of winter?

The notes of the bird as it sang in salutation this bright, unexpected day, the brightness of t flower that shone as if with its radiance to tha the sun for coming to visit it, the sounds of merr making which told the lost and unhappy man th his fellow-creatures were joining with the rest nature in their rejoicings under the azure canopy heaven, all the aroma of joy, all this up-springin of happiness, brought no calmer thoughts back Thibault, but rather increased the anger and bitte ness of his feelings. He would have liked the who world to be as dark and gloomy as was his ow soul. On first detecting the sounds of the approac ing rural band, he thought of running away from i but a power, stronger than his will, as it seemed him, held him rooted to the spot; so he hid himself the hollow of the oak and waited. Merry voice and lively songs could be heard mingling with th notes of the violins and hautboy; now and again gun went off, or a cracker exploded; and Thibau

t sure that all these festive sounds must be casioned by some village wedding. He was right, he soon caught sight of a procession of villagers, dressed in their best, with long ribands of many ours floating in the breeze, some from the men's waists, some from the men's hats or ton-holes. They emerged into view at the end the long lane of Ham.

They were headed by the fiddlers; then followed few peasants, and among them some figures, ich by their livery, Thibault recognised as keepers the service of the lord of Vez. Then came goulevent, the second huntsman, giving his arm an old blind woman, who was decked out with ands like the others; then the major-domo of the tle of Vez, as representative probably of the ner of the little huntsman, giving his arm to the de.

And the bride herself—Thibault stared at her with d fixed eyes; he endeavoured, but vainly, to suade himself that he did not recognise her—it s impossible not to do so when she came within ew paces from where he was hiding. The bride s Agnelette.

Agnelette!

And to crown his humiliation, as if to give a l blow to his pride, no pale and trembling nelette dragged reluctantly to the altar, casting ks behind her of regret or remembrance, but an nelette as bright and happy as the bird that was ging, the snowdrop that flowered, the sunlight t was shining; an Agnelette, full of delighted le in her wreath of orange flowers, her tulle and muslin dress; an Agnelette, in short, as and smiling as the virgin in the church at lers-Cotterets, when dressed in her beautiful te dress at Whitsuntide.

he was, no doubt, indebted for all this finery to Lady of the Castle, the wife of the lord of Vez, o was a true Lady Bountiful in such matters.

But the chief cause of Agnelette's happiness and les was not the great love she felt towards the

man who was to become her husband, but h contentment at having found what she so ardent desired, that which Thibault had wickedly promis to her without really wishing to give her—someo who would help her to support her blind c grandmother.

The musicians, the bride and bridegroom, t young men and maidens, passed along the ro within twenty paces of Thibault, without observi the head with its flaming hair and the eyes wi their fiery gleam looking out from the hollow the tree. Then, as Thibault had watched the appear through the undergrowth, so he watch them disappear. As the sounds of the violins a hautboy has gradually become louder and loud so now they became fainter and fainter, until another quarter of an hour the forest was as sile and deserted as ever, and Thibault was left alo with his singing bird, his flowering snowdrop, l glittering ray of sunlight. But a new fire of h had been lighted in his heart, the worst of the fi of hell, that which gnaws at the vitals like t sharpest serpent's tooth, and corrodes the blo like the most destructive poison—the fire jealousy.

On seeing Agnelette again, so fresh and pret so innocently happy, and, worse still, seeing h at the moment when she was about to be marri to another, Thibault, who had not given a thoug to her for the last three months, Thibault, who h never had any intention of keeping the promise whi he made her, Thibault now brought himself believe that he had never ceased to love her.

He persuaded himself that Agnelette was gaged to him by oath, that Engoulevent w carrying off what belonged to him, and he alm leaped from his hiding place to rush after her a reproach her with infidelity. Agnelette, now longer his, at once appeared to his eyes as endow with all the virtues and good qualities, all in sh that would make it advantageous to marry h which, when he had only to speak the word a

rything would have been his, he had not even pected.

After being the victim of so much deception, to e what he looked upon as his own particular asure, to which he had imagined that it would not too late to return at any time, simply because never dreamed that anyone would wish to take rom him, seemed to him the last stroke of ill tune. His despair was no less profound and omy that it was a mute despair. He bit his fists, knocked his head against the sides of the tree, finally began to cry and sob. But they were those tears and sobs which gradually soften heart and are often kindly agents in dispersing ad humour and reviving a better one; no, they e tears and sobs arising rather from anger than n regret, and these tears and sobs had no power drive the hatred out of Thibault's heart. As ne of his tears fell visibly adown his face, so it med that others fell on his heart within like ps of gall.

Ie declared that he loved Agnelette; he lamented having lost her; nevertheless, this furious man, h all his tender love, would gladly have seen fall dead, together with her bridegroom, at the t of the altar when the priest was about oin them. But happily, God, who was reserving two children for other trials, did not allow fatal wish to formulate itself in Thibault's d. They were like those who, surrounded by rm, hear the noise of the thunder and see the ked flashes of the lightning, and yet remain ouched by the deadly fluid.

Before long the shoemaker began to feel ashamed his tears and sobs; he forced back the former, made an effort to swallow the latter.

Ie came out of his lair, not quite knowing where was, and rushed off in the direction of his hut, ering a league in a quarter of an hour; this mad e, however, by causing him to perspire, some-at calmed him down. At last he recognized the roundings of his home; he went into his hut as

a tiger might enter its den, closed the door beh him, and went and crouched down in the dark corner he could find in his miserable lodgi There, his elbows on his knees, his chin on his han he sat and thought. And what thoughts were t which occupied this unhappy, desperate ma Ask of Milton what were Satan's thoughts after fall.

He went over again all the old questions wh had upset his mind from the beginning, which brought despair upon so many before him, would bring despair to so many that came after h

Why should some be born in bondage and oth be born to power?

Why should there be so much inequality v regard to a thing which takes place in exactly same way in all classes—namely birth?

By what means can this game of nature's, which chance for ever holds the cards aga mankind, be made a fairer one?

And is not the only way to accomplish this, do what the clever gamester does—get the devi back him up? he had certainly thought so once.

To cheat? He had tried that game himself. what had he gained by it? Each time he had a good hand, each time he had felt sure of the ga it was the devil after all who had won.

What benefit had he reaped from this de power that had been given him of working evi others?

None.

Agnelette had been taken from him; the ow of the mill had driven him away; the Bailiff's had made game of him.

His first wish had caused the death of p Marcotte, and had not even procured him a hau of the buck that he had been so ambitious to obt and this had been the starting point of all disappointed longings, for he had been obliged give the buck to the dogs so as to put them the scent of the black wolf.

And then this rapid multiplication of devil's h

s appalling! He recalled the tale of the losopher who asked for a grain of wheat, ltiplied by each of the sixty-four squares of the ss board—the abundant harvests of a thousand rs were required to fill the last square. And —how many wishes yet remained to him?—seven eight at the outside. The unhappy man dared look at himself either in the spring which lurked the foot of one of the trees in the forest, or he mirror that hung against the wall. He feared render an exact account to himself of the time l left to him in which to exercise his power; he ferred to remain in the night of uncertainty rather n to face that terrible dawn which must rise when night was over.

ut still, there must be a way of continuing ters, so that the misfortunes of others should ıg him good of some kind. He thought surely if he had received a scientific education, instead being a poor shoemaker, scarcely knowing how ead or cypher, he would have found out, by the of science, some combinations which would llibly have procured for him both riches and piness.

oor fool! If he had been a man of learning, would have known the legend of Doctor Faust. what did the omnipotence conferred on him by phistopheles lead Faust, the dreamer, the thinker, pre-eminent scholar? To the murder of Valen- ! to Margaret's suicide! to the pursuit of Helen Troy, the pursuit of an empty shadow!

nd moreover, how could Thibault think coher- y at all of ways and means while jealousy was ng in his heart, while he continued to picture nelette at the altar, giving herself for life to ther than himself.

nd who was that other? That wretched little oulevent, the man who had spied him out when vas perched in the tree, who had found his boar- r in the bush, who had been the cause of the es he had received from Marcotte.

h! if he had but known! to him and not to

Marcotte would he have willed that evil sho
befall! What was the physical torture he had unc
gone from the blows of the strap compared to
moral torture he was enduring now!

And if only ambition had not taken such h
upon him, had not borne him on the wings of pi
above his sphere, what happiness might have b
his, as the clever workman, able to earn as m
as six francs a day, with Agnelette for his charm
little housekeeper! For he had certainly been
one whom Agnelette had first loved; perha
although marrying another man, she still loved h
And as Thibault sat pondering over these thir
he became conscious that time was passing, t
night was approaching.

However modest might be the fortune of
wedded pair, however limited the desires of
peasants who had followed them, it was quite cer
that bride, bridegroom and peasants were all
this hour feasting merrily together.

And he, he was sad and alone. There was
one to prepare a meal for him; and what was th
in his house to eat or drink? A little bread
little water! and solitude! in place of that bless
from heaven which we call a sister, a mistres
wife.

But, after all, why should not he also dine me
and abundantly? Could he not go and dine wh
soever he liked? Had he not money in his po
from the last game he had sold to the host of
Boule-d'Or? And could he not spend on himse
much as the wedded couple and all their gu
together? He had only himself to please.

"And, by my faith!" he exclaimed, "I an
idiot indeed to stay here, with my brain racke
jealousy, and my stomach with hunger, when,
the aid of a good dinner and two or three bottle
wine, I can rid myself of both torments be
another hour is over. I will be off to get f
and better still, to get drink!"

In order to carry this determination into ef
Thibault took the road to Ferté-Milon, where t

s an excellent restaurant, known as the *Dauphin r*, able it was said to serve up dinners equal to se provided by his head cook for his Highness Duke of Orleans.

CHAPTER XV

THE LORD OF VAUPARFOND

THIBAULT, on arriving at the *Dauphin d'* ordered himself as fine a dinner as he could th of. It would have been quite easy for him to h engaged a private room, but he would not then h enjoyed the personal sense of superiority. wished the company of ordinary diners to see h eat his pullet, and his eel in its delicate sauce. wished the other drinkers to envy him his th different wines, drunk out of three different sha glasses. He wished everybody to hear him g his orders in a haughty voice, to hear the ring his money.

As he gave his first order, a man in a grey co seated in the darkest corner of the room wit half bottle of wine before him, turned round, if recognising a voice he knew. And, as it tur out, this was one of Thibault's acquaintances is scarcely necessary to add, a tavern acquaintar

Thibault, since he had given up making sh by day and, instead, had his wolves about at nig had made many such acquaintances. On see that it was Thibault, the other man turned his h away quickly, but not so quickly but that Thib had time to recognise Auguste François Levass valet to Raoul the Lord of Vauparfond.

"Halloa! François!" Thibault called out, "w are you doing sitting there in the corner, sulking like a Monk in Lent, instead of tak your dinner openly and cheerfully as I am doi in full view of everybody?"

rançois made no reply to this interrogation, but ıed to Thibault to hold his tongue.

I am not to speak? not to speak?" said bault, "and supposing it does not suit me to l my tongue, supposing I wish to talk, and that n bored at having to dine alone? and that it ses me to say; 'Friend François, come here; vite you to dine with me?' You will not? no! well, then I shall come and fetch you." And bault rose from his seat, and followed by all . went up to his friend and gave him a slap on shoulder vigorous enough to dislocate it.

Pretend that you have made a mistake, bault, or you will lose me my place; do you see that I am not in livery, but am only wearing drab great-coat! I am here as proxy in a love r for my master, and I am waiting for a letter n a lady to carry back to him."

That's another matter altogether, and I under- d now and am sorry for my indiscretion. I ıld like, however, to have dined in your pany."

Well, nothing is easier; order your dinner to served in a separate room, and I will give the d to our host, that if another man dressed in like me comes in, he is to show him upstairs, and I are old cronies, and understand one her."

Good," said Thibault; and he therewith ordered dinner to be taken up to a room on the first r, which looked out upon the street.

rançois seated himself so as to be able to see person he was expecting, while still some distance as he came down the hill of Ferté-Milon. The er which Thibault had ordered was quite cient for the two; all that he did was to send another bottle or so of wine. Thibault had only n two lessons from Maître Magloire, but he been an apt pupil, and they had done their k; moreover Thibault had something which he ıed to forget, and he counted on the wine to mplish this for him. It was good fortune, he

felt, to have met a friend with whom he could t for, in the state of mind and heart in which he v talking was as good a help towards oblivion drinking. Accordingly, he was no sooner sea and the door shut, and his hat stuck well d onto his head so that François might not no the change in the colour of his hair, than he b at once into conversation, boldly taking the by the horns.

"And now, friend François," he said, "you going to explain to me some of your words wl I did not quite understand."

"I am not surprised at that," replied Franç leaning back in his chair with an air of conce impertinence, "we attendants on fashionable lo learn to speak court language, which everyone course does not understand."

"Perhaps not, but if you explain it to y friends, they may possibly understand."

"Quite so! ask what you like and I will answe

"I look to your doing so the more, as I undertake to supply you with what will help loosen your tongue. First, let me ask, why you call yourself a *grey-coat*? I thought *grey-* another name for a jack-ass."

"Jack-ass yourself, friend Thibault," François, laughing at the shoemaker's ignora "No, a *grey-coat* is a liveried servant who puts a grey overall to hide his livery, while he sta sentinel behind a pillar, or mounts guard insid doorway."

"So you mean that at this moment then, good François, you are on sentry go? And is coming to relieve you?"

"Champagne, who is in the Comtesse de M Gobert's service."

"I see; I understand exactly. Your master, Lord of Vauparfond, is in love with the Comt de Mont-Gobert, and you are now awaiting a le which Champagne is to bring from the lady."

"*Optimé!* as the tutor to Monsieur Rac young brother says."

My Lord Raoul is a lucky fellow!"

Yes indeed," said François, drawing himself

And what a beautiful creature the Countess

You know her then?"

I have seen her out hunting with his Highness Duke of Orleans and Madame de Montesson."

hibault in speaking had said *out hunting*.

My friend, let me tell you that in society we not say *hunting* and *shooting*, but *huntin'* and *otin'*."

Oh!" said Thibault, "I am not so particular a letter as all that. To the health of my Lord ul!"

s François put down his glass on the table, he red an exclamation; he had that moment caught t of Champagne.

hey threw open the window and called to this d comer, and Champagne, with all the ready ition of the well-bred servant, understood at e, and went upstairs. He was dressed, like nçois, in a long grey coat, and had brought a er with him.

Well," asked François, as he caught sight of letter in his hand, "and is there to be a meeting ight?"

Yes," answered Champagne, with evident ght.

That's all right," said François cheerfully.

hibault was surprised at these expressions of arent sympathy on the part of the servants with r master's happiness.

Is it your master's good luck that you are so sed about?" he asked of François.

Oh, dear me, no!" replied the latter, "but n my master is engaged, I am at liberty!"

And do you make use of your liberty?"

One may be a valet, and yet have one's own e of good luck, and also know how to spend time more or less profitably," answered nçois, bridling as he spoke.

"And you, Champagne?"

"Oh, I," replied the last comer, holding wine up to the light, "yes, I too hope to m good use of it."

"Well, then, here's to all your love affairs! si everybody seems to have one or more on han said Thibault.

"The same to yours!" replied the two ot men in chorus.

"As to myself," said the shoemaker, a look hatred to his fellow creatures passing over his fa "I am the only person who loves nobody, whom nobody loves."

His companion looked at him with a cert surprised curiosity.

"Ah! ah!" said François, "is the report t is whispered abroad about you in the country-s a true tale then?"

"Report about me?"

"Yes, about you," put in Champagne.

"Oh, then they say the same thing about me Mont-Gobert as they do at Vauparfond?"

Champagne nodded his head.

"Well, and what is it they do say?"

"That you were a were-wolf," said François.

Thibault laughed aloud. "Tell me, now, h I a tail?" he said. "Have I a wolf's claws, h I a wolf's snout?"

"We only repeat what other people sa rejoined Champagne, "we do not say that is so."

"Well, anyhow, you must acknowledge," s Thibault, "that were-wolves have excellent win

"By my faith, yes!" exclaimed both the vale

"To the health of the devil who provides gentlemen."

The two men who were holding their glasses their hand, put both glasses down on the table.

"What is that for?" asked Thibault.

"You must find someone else to drink t health with you," said François, "I won't, th flat!"

"Nor I," added Champagne.

"Well and good then! I will drink all three asses myself," and he immediately proceeded to so.

"Friend Thibault," said the Baron's valet, "it ime we separated."

"So soon?" said Thibault.

"My master is awaiting me, and no doubt with ne impatience . . . the letter, Champagne?"

"Here it is."

"Let us take farewell then of our friend ibault, and be off to our business and our asures, and leave him to his pleasures and iness." And so saying, François winked at his nd, who responded with a similar sign of underding between them.

"We must not separate," said Thibault, "withdrinking a stirrup-cup together."

But not in those glasses," said François, point- to the three from which Thibault had drunk he enemy of mankind.

You are very particular, gentlemen; better the sacristan and have them washed in holy er."

Not quite that, but rather than refuse the polite tation of a friend, we will call for the waiter, have fresh glasses brought."

These three, then," said Thibault, who was inning to feel the effects of the wine he had nk, "are fit for nothing more than to be thrown of the window. To the devil with you!" he aimed as he took up one of them and sent it g. As the glass went through the air it left a k of light behind it. which blazed and went out a flash of lightning. Thibault took up the two aining glasses and threw them in turn, and each the same thing happened, but the third flash followed by a loud peal of thunder.

hibault shut the window, and was thinking, as urned to his seat again, how he should explain strange occurrence to his companions; but his companions had disappeared.

"Cowards!" he muttered. Then he looked a glass, but found none left.

"H'm! that's awkward," he said. "I n drink out of the bottle, that's all!"

And suiting the action to the word, Thib finished up his dinner by draining the bottle, wl did not help to steady his brain, already somev shaky.

At nine o'clock Thibault called the innkee paid his account, and departed.

He was in an angry disposition of enmity aga all the world; the thoughts from which he had hc to escape possessed him more and more. Agnel was being taken farther and farther from hin the time went by; everyone, wife or mistress, someone to love them. This day, which had l one of hatred and despair to him, had been full of the promise of joy and happiness for ev body else; the lord of Vauparfond, the two wret valets, François and Champagne, each of them a bright star of hope to follow; while he, he al went stumbling along in the darkness. Decid there was a curse upon him. "But," he wen thinking to himself, "if so, the pleasures of damned belong to me, and I have a right to c them."

As these thoughts went surging through his b as he walked along cursing aloud, shaking his at the sky, he was on the way to his hut and nearly reached it when he heard a horse co up behind him at a gallop.

"Ah!" said Thibault, "here comes the Lo Vauparfond, hastening to the meeting with his I should laugh, my fine Sir Raoul, if my Lo Mont-Gobert managed just to catch you! would not get off quite so easily as if it were M Magloire; there would be swords out, and l given and received!"

Thus engaged in thinking what would happ the Comte de Mont-Gobert were to surpris rival, Thibault, who was walking in the road dently did not get out of the way quickly en

the horseman, seeing a peasant of some kind ring his passage, brought his whip down upon n in a violent blow, calling out at the same time: Get out of the way, you beggar, if you don't wish be trampled under the horse's feet!"

Thibault, still half drunk, was conscious of a wd of mingled sensations, of the lashing of the ip, the collision with the horse, and the rolling ough cold water and mud, while the horseman sed on.

He rose to his knees, furious with anger, and king his fist at the retreating figure:

"Would the devil," he exclaimed, "I might just once have my turn at being one of you great ds, might just for twenty-four hours take your ce, Monsieur Raoul de Vauparfond, instead of ng only Thibault, the shoemaker, so that I ght know what it was to have a fine horse to e, instead of tramping on foot; might be able whip the peasants I met on the road, and have opportunity of paying court to these beautiful men who deceive their husbands, as the ntesse de Mont-Gobert does!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth, when Baron's horse shied, throwing the rider over head.

CHAPTER XVI

MY LADY'S LADY

THIBAULT was delighted at seeing what h happened to the young Baron, whose ha anything but light, had so shortly before made t of his whip on Thibault's shoulders, which s smarted with the blow. The latter now ran at t speed to see how far Monsieur Raoul de Vaup fond was injured; he found a body lying insensib stretched across the road, with the horse standi and snorting beside it.

But Thibault could hardly believe his senses perceiving that the figure lying in the road was n the same as had, but five minutes previously, rido past him and given him the lash with the whip. the first place, this figure was not in the dress a gentleman, but clothed like a peasant, and, w was more, the clothes he had on seemed Thibault to be the same as he himself had b wearing only a moment before. His surprise creased more and more and amounted almost stupefaction on further recognising, in the ine unconscious figure, not only his own clothes, his own face. His astonishment naturally led h to turn his eyes from this second Thibault to own person, when he became aware that an equa remarkable change had come over his costur Instead of shoes and gaiters, his legs were n encased in an elegant pair of hunting boots, rea ing to the knee, as soft and smooth as a pair silk stockings, with a roll over the instep, a finished off with a pair of fine silver spurs. T knee-breeches were no longer of corduroy, but

most beautiful buckskin, fastened with little d buckles. His long coarse olive-coloured coat s replaced by a handsome green hunting-coat, h gold lace facings, thrown open to display a istcoat of fine white jean, while over the artisti- y pleated shirt hung the soft wavy folds of a nbric cravat. Not a single article of dress about n but had been transformed, even to his old tern-shaped hat, which was now a three-cornered , trimmed with gold lace to match the coat. e stick also, such as workmen carry partly for lking and partly for self-defence, and which he been holding in his hand a minute before, had v given place to a light whip, with which he gave cut through the air, listening with a sense of stocratic pleasure to the whistling sound it made. d finally, his slender figure was drawn in at the st by a belt, from which hung a hunting-knife, f-sword, half-dagger.

Thibault was pleased beyond measure at finding nself clothed in such a delightful costume, and h a feeling of vanity, natural under the circum- nces, he was overcome with the desire to ascer- n without delay how the dress suited his face. t where could he go to look at himself, out there the midst of pitch darkness? Then, looking ut him, he saw that he was only a stone's throw m his own hut.

"Ah! to be sure!" he said, "nothing easier, I have my glass there."

And he made haste towards his hut, intending, Narcissus, to enjoy his own beauty in peace and to himself. But the door of the hut was locked, Thibault felt vainly for the key. All he could in his pockets was a well-filled purse, a sweet- at box containing scented lozenges, and a little ther-of-pearl and gold penknife. What could he e done then with his door-key? Then suddenly right thought occurred to him—possibly the key s in the pocket of that other Thibault who was g out there in the road. He went back and in the breeches pocket, where he discovered

the key at once, in company with a few so
Holding the rough clumsy thing in the tips of
fingers, he returned to open the door. The ins
of the hut was even darker than the night outsi
and Thibault groped about to find the steel,
tinder and flint, and the matches, and then p
ceeded to try and light the candle, which consis
of an end stuck into an empty bottle. In a sec
or two this was accomplished, but in the course
the operation Thibault was obliged to take hold
the candle with his fingers.

"Pah!" he said, "what pigs these peasants a
I wonder how they *can* live in this dirty sort
way!"

However, the candle was alight, which was
chief matter, and Thibault now took down
mirror, and bringing it to the light, looked at h
self in it. His eye had scarcely caught sight
the reflected image before he uttered a cry
astonishment; it was no longer himself that he s
or rather, although it was still Thibault in spi
it was no longer Thibault in body. His spirit
entered into the body of a handsome young n
of twenty-five or twenty-six years of age, with b
eyes, pink fresh cheeks, red lips, and white tee
in short, it had entered into the body of the Ba
Raoul de Vauparfond. Then Thibault recalled
wish that he had uttered in his moment of an
after the blow from the whip and his collision w
the horse. His wish had been that for four
twenty hours he might be the Baron Vauparfo
and the Baron de Vauparfond be Thibault, wh
now explained to him what had at first seem
inexplicable, why the unconscious man now ly
in the road was dressed in his clothes and had
face.

"But I must not forget one thing," he s
"that is, that although I seem to be here, I
not really here, but lying out there, so I must
careful to see that during the twenty-four ho
during which I shall be imprudent enough to
away from myself, no irreparable harm comes

:. Come now, Monsieur de Vauparfond, do not so fastidious; carry the poor man in, and lay n gently on his bed here." And, although with aristocratic instincts Monsieur de Vauparfond ınd the task very repugnant to him, Thibault, vertheless, courageously took up his own body his arms and carried himself from the road to bed. Having thus placed the body in safety, blew out the light, for fear that any harm should ne to this other self before he came to; then, efully locking the door, he hid the key in the low of a tree, where he was in the habit of ving it when not wishing to take it with him.

The next thing to do was to get hold of the rse's bridle and mount into the saddle. Once re, Thibault had a preliminary moment of some asiness, for, having travelled more on foot than horseback, he was not an accomplished rider, l he naturally feared that he might not be able keep his seat when the horse began to move. it seemed, that, while inheriting Raoul's body, also inherited his physical qualities, for the se, being an intelligent beast, and perfectly conus of the momentary want of assurance on the t of his rider, made an effort to throw him, ereupon Thibault instinctively gathered up the ıs, pressed his knees against the horse's sides, his spurs into them, and gave the animal two three cuts of the whip, which brought it to er on the spot.

hibault, perfectly unknown to himself, was a master in horsemanship. This little affair with horse enabled Thibault more fully to realize his lity. As far as the body was concerned, he was Baron Raoul de Vauparfond from top to toe; as far as the spirit was concerned, he was still bault. It was, therefore, certain that the spirit he young lord who had lent him his body was sleeping in the form of the unconscious bault which he had left behind in the hut.

he division of substance and spirit between him- and the Baron, however, left him with a very

vague idea of what he was going, or would ha to do. That he was going to Mont-Gobert answer to the Countess's letter, so much he kne But what was in the letter? At what hour w he expected? How was he to gain admission the Castle? Not one of these questions could answer, and it only remained for him to disco what to do, step by step, as he proceed Suddenly it flashed across him that probably t Countess's letter was somewhere on his pers He felt about his dress, and, sure enough, ins the side pocket of his coat was something, wh by its shape, seemed to be the article he want He stopped his horse, and putting his hand i his pocket, drew out a little scented leather c lined with white satin. In one side of the c were several letters, in the other only one; doubt the latter would tell him what he wanted know, if he could once get to read it. He was n only a short distance from the village of Fleu and he galloped on hoping that he might find house still lighted up. But villagers go to b early, in those days even earlier than they do n and Thibault went from one end of the street the other without seeing a single light. At la thinking he heard some kind of movement in t stables of an Inn, he called. A stable-boy sall out with a lantern, and Thibault, forgetting for t moment that he was a lord, said: "Friend, co you show me a light for a moment? You wo be doing me a service."

"And that's what you go and call a chap of bed for?" answered the stable-boy rude "Well, you are a nice sort of young'un, you are and turning his back on Thibault he was just goi to re-enter the stable, when Thibault, perceivi that he had gone on a wrong tack, now raised voice, calling out:

"Look here, sirrah, bring your lantern here a give me a light, or I'll lay my whip across yo back!"

"Ah! pardon, my lord!" said the stable-b

I did not see who it was I was speaking to."
nd he immediately stood on tip-toe holding the
ntern up as Thibault directed him.
Thibault unfolded the letter and read:

"My dear Raoul,
"The goddess Venus has certainly taken us
der her protection. A grand hunt of some kind
to take place to-morrow out in the direction of
ury; I know no particulars about it, all I do
ow is, that *he* is going away this evening. Do you,
efore, start at nine o'clock, so as to be here
half-past ten. Come in by the way you know;
neone whom you know will be awaiting you,
l will bring you, you know where. Last time
i came, I don't mean to upbraid you, but it did
m to me you stayed a long time in the corridors.
"Jane."

Devil take it!" muttered Thibault.
I beg your pardon, my lord?" said the stable-
.
Nothing, you lout, except that I do not require
any longer and you can go."
A good journey to you, my lord!" said the
ble-boy, bowing to the ground, and he went
k to his stable.
Devil take it!" repeated Thibault, "the letter
s me precious little information, except that we
under the protection of the goddess Venus, that
goes away this evening, that the Comtesse de
nt-Gobert expects me at half-past ten, and that
Christian name is Jane. As for the rest, I am
o in by *the way I know*, I shall be awaited by
eone I know, and taken *where I know*." Thi-
t scratched his ear, which is what everybody
, in every country of the world, when plunged
awkward circumstances. He longed to go
wake up the Lord of Vauparfond's spirit, which
just now sleeping in Thibault's body on Thi-
t's bed; but, apart from the loss of time which
would involve, it might also cause considerable

inconvenience, for the Baron's spirit, on seeing i own body so near to it, might be taken with tl desire of re-entering it. This would give rise a struggle in which Thibault could not well defe himself without doing serious harm to his ov person; some other way out of the difficulty mu therefore be found. He had heard a great de about the wonderful sagacity of animals, and h himself, during his life in the country, had occ sion more than once to admire their instinct, and now determined to trust to that of his hors Riding back into the main road, he turned the hor in the direction of Mont-Gobert, and let it ha its head. The horse immediately started off at gallop; it had evidently understood. Thiba troubled himself no further, it was now the hors affair to bring him safely to his destination. (reaching the corner of the park wall the anin stopped, not apparently because it was in doubt to which road to take, but something seemed make it uneasy, and it pricked its ears. At t same time, Thibault also fancied that he caug sight of two shadows; but they must have be only shadows, for although he stood up in stirrups and looked all around him, he could absolutely nothing. They were probably poach he thought, who had reasons like himself for wi ing to get inside the park. There being no lon anything to bar his passage, he had only, as befc to let the horse go its own way, and he accordin did so. The horse followed the walls of the p at a quick trot, carefully choosing the soft edge the road, and not uttering a single neigh; intelligent animal seemed as if it knew that must make no sound or at least as little sound possible.

In this way they went along the whole of side of the park, and on reaching the corner, horse turned as the wall turned, and stopped bel a small breach in the same. "It's through h evidently," said Thibault, "that we have to gc

The horse answered by sniffing at the bre

nd scraping the ground with its foot; Thibault ave the animal the rein, and it managed to climb o and through the breach, over the loose stones hich rolled away beneath its hoofs. Horse and der were now within the park. One of the three fficulties had been successfully overcome: Thiault had got in by the *way he knew*; it now reained to find the person *whom he knew*, and he ought it wisest to leave this also to his horse. he horse went on for another five minutes, and en stopped at a short distance from the Castle, efore the door of one of those little huts of rough gs and bark and clay which are built up in parks, painters introduce buildings into their landapes, solely for the sake of ornament.

On hearing the horse's hoofs, someone partly pened the door, and the horse stopped in front of

A pretty girl came out, and asked in a low voice, Is it you, Monsieur Raoul?"

"Yes, my child, it is I," answered Thibault, smounting.

"Madame was terribly afraid that drunken fool a Champagne might not have given you the tter."

"She need not have been afraid; Champagne ought it me with the most exemplary punctuality."

"Leave your horse then and come."

"But who will look after it?"

"Why Cramoisi, of course, the man who always es."

"Ah, yes, to be sure," said Thibault, as if these tails were familiar to him, "Cramoisi will look ter it."

"Come, come," said the maid, "we must make ste or Madame will complain again that we loiter the corridors." And as she spoke these words, hich recalled a phrase in the letter which had been itten to Raoul, she laughed, and showed a row pearly white teeth, and Thibault felt that he ould like to loiter in the park, before waiting to t into the corridors.

Then the maid suddenly stood still a mome with her head bent, listening.

"What is it?" asked Thibault.

"I thought I heard the sound of a branch crea ing under somebody's foot."

"Very likely," said Thibault, "no dou Cramoisi's foot."

"All the more reason that you should be care what you do . . . at all events out here."

"I don't understand."

"Do you not know that Cramoisi is the m I am engaged to?"

"Ah! to be sure! But when I am alone w you, my dear Rose, I always forget that."

"I am called Rose now, am I! I never kn such a forgetful man as you are, Monsie Raoul."

"I call you Rose, my pretty one, because t rose is the queen of flowers, as you are the que of waiting-maids."

"In good truth, my lord," said the maid, ' have always found you a lively, witty gentlema but you surpass yourself this evening."

Thibault drew himself up, flattered by this rema —really a letter addressed to the Baron, but whi it had fallen to the shoemaker to unseal.

"Let us hope your mistress will think the same he said.

"As to that," said the waiting-maid, "any m can make one of these ladies of fashion think h the cleverest and wittiest in the world, simply holding his tongue."

"Thank you," he said, "I will remember wl you say."

"Hush!" said the girl to Thibault, "there Madame behind the dressing-room curtains; foll me now staidly."

For they had now to cross an open space that between the wooded part of the park and the flig of steps leading up to the Castle. Thibault beg walking towards the latter.

"Now, now," said the maid, catching hold

m by the arm, "what are you doing, you foolish an?"

"What am I doing? well, I confess, Suzette, I n't know in the least what I *am* doing!"

"Suzette! so that's my name now, is it? I think onsieur does me the honour of calling me in turn the name of all his mistresses. But come this ay! You are not dreaming I suppose of going rough the great reception rooms. That would ve a fine opportunity to my lord the Count, uly!"

And the maid hurried Thibault towards a little or, to the right of which was a spiral staircase.

Half-way up, Thibault put his arm round his mpanion's waist, which was as slender and supple a snake.

"I think we must be in the corridors now, eh?" asked, trying to kiss the young woman's pretty eek.

"No, not yet," she answered; "but never mind at."

"By my faith," he said, "if my name this even- g were Thibault instead of Raoul, I would carry u up with me to the garrets, instead of stopping the first floor!"

At that moment a door was heard grating on its nges.

"Quick, quick, Monsieur!" said the maid, Madame is growing impatient."

And drawing Thibault after her, she ran up the maining stairs to the corridor, opened a door, shed Thibault into a room, and shut the door ter him, firmly believing that it was the Baron oul de Vauparfond or, as she herself called him, e most forgetful man in the world, whom she had us secured.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BARON DE MONT-GOBERT

THIBAULT found himself in the Countess room. If the magnificence of Bailiff M gloire's furniture, rescued from the lumber-roo of his Highness the Duke of Orleans, had asto ished Thibault, the daintiness, the harmony, tl taste of the Countess's room filled him wi intoxicating delight. The rough child of the fore had never seen anything like it, even in dream for one cannot even dream of things of which w have no idea.

Double curtains were drawn across the tw windows, the one set of white silk trimmed wi lace, the other of pale china blue satin, embroidere with silver flowers. The bed and the toilet tab were draped to match the windows, and were near smothered in clouds of Valenciennes lace. Tl walls were hung with very light rose-coloured sil over which thick folds of Indian muslin, delica as woven air, undulated like waves of mist at tl slightest breath of air from the door. The ceilin was composed of a medallion painted by Bouche and representing the toilet of Venus; she was han ing her cupids the various articles of a woman apparel, and these were now all distributed, wi the exception of the goddess's girdle.

The central medallion was surrounded by a seri of panels, on which were painted supposed vie of Cnidos, Paphos, and Amathus. All the furnitu —chairs, armchairs, settees, sociables—was covere with China satin similar to that of the curtain over the groundwork of the carpet, of the colo

pale green water, were scattered bouquets of ue corn-flowers, pink poppies, and white daisies. ne tables were of rose-wood; the corner-pieces of dian lacquer; and the whole room was softly hted by pink wax candles held in two candelabra. vague and indescribably delicate perfume per-ded the air, one could not say from what sweet sence, for it was scarcely even a perfume, but ther an emanation, the same kind of odorous halation whereby Æneas, in the Æneid, recog-zed the presence of his mother.

Thibault, pushed into the room by the waiting-aid, made one step forward, and then stopped. e had taken everything in at a glance, inhaled erything at a breath. For a second there passed fore his mind's eye like a vision—Agnelette's tle cottage, Madame Polet's dining-room, the d-chamber of the Bailiff's wife; but they dis-peared as quickly to give place to this delicious radise of love into which he had been transported by magic. He could scarcely believe that what looked upon was real. Were there really men d women in the world so blessed by fortune as live in such surroundings as these? Had he not en carried to some wizard's castle, to some fairy's lace? And those who enjoyed such favour as is, what special good had they done? what special il had they done, who were deprived of these vantages? Why, instead of wishing to be the ron for four and twenty hours, had he not wished be the Countess's lap-dog all his life? How ould he bear to be Thibault again after having seen this? He had just reached this point in his flections, when the dressing-room door opened d the Countess herself appeared, a fit bird for ch a nest, a fit flower for such a sweet scented rden.

Her hair, fastened only by four diamond pins, ng down loosely to one side, while the rest was thered into one large curl that hung over the other oulder and fell into her bosom. The graceful es of her lithe and well-formed figure, no longer

hidden by puffings of dress, were clearly indic beneath her loose pink silk gown, richly cove with lace; so fine and transparent was the silk her stockings, that it was more like pearl-w flesh than any texture, and her tiny feet were sho little slippers made of cloth of silver, with red he But not an atom of jewellery—no bracelets on arms, no rings on the fingers; just one row of pe round the throat, that was all—but what pea worth a king's ransom!

As this radiant apparition came towards h Thibault fell on his knees; he bowed himself, feel crushed at the sight of this luxury, of this bea which to him seemed inseparable.

"Yes, yes, you may well kneel—kneel lo lower yet—kiss my feet, kiss the carpet, kiss floor, but I shall not any the more forgive . . . you are a monster!"

"In truth, Madame, if I compare myself w you, I am even worse than that!"

"Ah! yes, pretend that you mistake my wo and think I am only speaking of your outw appearance, when you know I am speaking of y behaviour . . . and, indeed, if your perfidious s were imaged in your face, you would verily a indeed be a monster of ugliness. But yet it is so, for Monsieur, for all his wickedness a infamous doings, still remains the handsom gentleman in all the country round. But, co now, Monsieur, ought you not to be ashamed yourself?"

"Because I am the handsomest gentleman in neighbourhood?" asked Thibault, detecting by tone of the lady's voice that his crime was not irremediable one.

"No, Monsieur, but for having the blackest s and the falsest heart ever hidden beneath such gay and golden exterior. Now, get up, and co and give an account of yourself to me."

And the Countess so speaking held out a ha to Thibault which offered pardon at the same ti that it demanded a kiss.

Thibault took the soft, sweet hand in his own d kissed it; never had his lips touched anything so e satin. The Countess now seated herself on the tee and made a sign to Raoul to sit down side her.

'Let me know something of your doings, since u were last here," said the Countess to him.

'First tell me, dear Countess," replied Thibault, when I last was here."

'Do you mean you have forgotten? One does t generally acknowledge things of that kind, less seeking for a cause of quarrel."

'On the contrary, dear friend, it is because the ollection of that last visit is so present with me, t I think it must have been only yesterday we re together, and I try in vain to recall what I ve done, and I assure you I have committed no er crime since yesterday but that of loving you."

'That's not a bad speech; but you will not get urself out of disgrace by paying compliments."

'Dear Countess," said Thibault, "supposing we off explanations to another time."

'No, you must answer me now; it is five days ce I last saw you; what have you been doing all t time?"

'I am waiting for you to tell me, Countess. w can you expect me, conscious as I am of my ocence, to accuse myself?"

'Very well then! I will not begin by saying thing about your loitering in the corridors."

'Oh, pray, let us speak of it! how can you nk, Countess, that knowing you, the diamond of monds, was waiting for me, I should stop to k up an imitation pearl?"

'Ah! but I know how fickle men are, and ette is such a pretty girl!"

'Not so, dear Jane, but you must understand t she, being our confidante, and knowing all our rets, I cannot treat her quite like a servant."

'How agreeable it must be to be able to say to self 'I am deceiving the Comtesse de Mont-bert and I am the rival of Monsieur Cramoisi!'"

"Very well then, there must be no more loiterin in the corridors, no more kisses for poor Liset supposing of course there ever have been any!"

"Well, after all, there is no great harm in that

"Do you mean that I have done something ev worse?"

"Where had you been the other night, when y were met on the road between Erneville a Villers-Cotterets?"

"Someone met me on the road?"

"Yes, on the Erneville Road; where were y coming from?"

"I was coming home from fishing."

"Fishing! what fishing?"

"They had been drawing the Berval ponds."

"Oh! we know all about that; you are such fine fisher, are you not, Monsieur? And what s of an eel were you bringing back in your n returning from your fishing at two o'clock in morning!"

"I had been dining with my friend, the Bar at Vez."

"At Vez? ha! I fancy you went there mainly console the beautiful recluse, whom the jeal Baron keeps shut up there a regular prisoner, they say. But even that I can forgive you."

"What, is there a blacker crime still?" s Thibault, who was beginning to feel quite reassur seeing how quickly the pardon followed on accusation, however serious it appeared at first.

"Yes, at the ball given by his Highness the D of Orleans."

"What ball?"

"Why, the one yesterday! it's not so very l ago, is it?"

"Oh, yesterday's ball? I was admiring you."

"Indeed; but I was not there."

"Is it necessary for you to be present, Jane, me to admire you; cannot one admire you remembrance as truly as in person? and if, w absent, you triumph by comparison, the victory only so much the greater."

' I daresay, and it was in order to carry out the nparison to its utmost limits that you danced r times with Madame de Bonneuil; they are very tty, are they not, those dark women who cover mselves with rouge, and have eyebrows like the inese mannikins on my screens and moustaches a grenadier."

' Do you know what we talked about during se four dances? "

' It is true then, that you danced four times with ? "

' It is true, no doubt, since you say so."

' Is that a proper sort of answer? "

' What other could I give? could anyone condict what was said by so pretty a mouth? not ertainly, who would still bless it, even though it re pronouncing my sentence of death."

And, as if to await this sentence, Thibault fell his knees before the Countess, but at that ment, the door opened, and Lisette rushed in full alarm.

" Ah! Monsieur, Monsieur," she cried, " save urself! here comes my master the Count! "

' The Count! " exclaimed the Countess.

" Yes, the Count in person, and his huntsman stocq, with him."

" Impossible! "

" I assure you, Madame, Cramoisi saw them as in as I see you; the poor fellow was quite pale th fright."

" Ah! then the meet at Thury was all a pretence, trap to catch me? "

" Who can tell, Madame? Alas! alas! men are ch deceiving creatures! "

" What is to be done? " asked the Countess.

" Wait for the Count and kill him," said Thibault solutely, furious at again seeing his good fortune caping from him, at losing what above all things had been his ambition to possess.

" Kill him! kill the Count? are you mad, Raoul? o, no, you must fly, you must save yourself. . . . sette! Lisette! take the Baron through my

dressing-room." And in spite of his resistan Lisette by dint of pushing got him safely aw Only just in time! steps were heard coming up t wide main staircase. The Countess, with a last wo of love to the supposed Raoul, glided quickly in her bedroom, while Thibault followed Lisette. S led him rapidly along the corridor, where Cramo was keeping guard at the other end; then into room, and through this into another, and finally in a smaller one which led into a little tower; hei the fugitives came again on to a stairca corresponding with the one by which they h gone up, but when they reached the botto they found the door locked. Lisette, wi Thibault still following, went back up a few ste into a sort of office in which was a window lookin over the garden; this she opened. It was only few feet from the ground, and Thibault jumped ou landing safely below.

"You know where your horse is," called Lisett "jump on its back, and do not stop till you get Vauparfond."

Thibault would have liked to thank her for her kindly warnings, but she was some six feet abo him and he had no time to lose. A stride or tw brought him to the clump of trees under which stoo the little building which served as stable for h horse. But was the horse still there? He heard neigh which reassured him: only the neigh sounde he thought more like a cry of pain. Thibault wei in, put out his hand, felt the horse, gathered u the reins, and leaped on to its back without touchin the stirrups; Thibault, as we have already said, ha suddenly become a consummate horseman. But th horse no sooner felt the weight of the rider on it back than the poor beast began to totter on its leg Thibault dug his spurs in savagely, and the hors made a frantic effort to stand. But in anothe instant, uttering one of those pitiful neighs whic Thibault had heard when he approached the stable it rolled helplessly over on its side. Thibau quickly disengaged his leg from under the anima

ch, as the poor thing struggled to rise, he had difficulty in doing, and he found himself again his feet. Then it became clear to him, that in er to prevent his escape, Monsieur le Comte de nt-Gobert had hamstrung his horse.

'hibault uttered an oath: "If I ever meet , Monsieur Comte de Mont-Gobert," he said, swear that I will hamstring you, as you have nstrung this poor beast."

'hen he rushed out of the little building, and emembering the way he had come, turned in the rtion of the breach in the wall, and walking ckly towards it, found it, climbed over the stones, was again outside the park. But his further sage was barred, for there in front of him was figure of a man, who stood waiting, with a wn sword in his hand. Thibault recognised the nte de Mont-Gobert, the Comte de Mont-Gobert ught he recognised Raoul de Vauparfond.

Draw, Baron! " said the Count; further explana- was unnecessary. Thibault, on his side, equally aged at having the prey, on which he had already tooth and claw, snatched away from him, was ready to fight as the Count. He drew, not his rd, but his hunting-knife, and the two men ssed weapons.

hibault, who was something of an adept at rter-staff, had no idea of fencing; what was his prise therefore, when he found that he knew instinct how to handle his weapon, and could ry and thrust according to all the rules of the He parried the first two or three of the nt's blows with admirable skill.

Ah, I heard, I remember," muttered the Count ween his clenched teeth, "that at the last match rivalled Saint-Georges himself at the foils."

hibault had no conception who Saint-Georges ht be, but he was conscious of a strength and ticity of wrist thanks to which he felt he might e rivalled the devil himself.

o far, he had only been on the defensive; but Count having aimed one or two unsuccessful

lunges at him, he saw his opportunity, struck o and sent his knife clean through his adversar shoulder. The Count dropped his sword, totter and falling onto one knee, cried "Help, Lestocq!

Thibault ought then to have sheathed his kn and fled; but, unfortunately, he remembered t oath he had taken as regards the Count, when he h found that his horse had been hamstrung. slipped the sharp blade of his weapon under t bent knee and drew it towards him; the Co uttered a cry; but as Thibault rose from his stoopi posture, he too felt a sharp pain between shoulder-blades, followed by a sensation as extreme cold over the chest, and finally the point a weapon appeared above his right breast. Th he saw a cloud of blood, and knew no mo Lestocq, called to his master's aid as the latter f had run to the spot, and, as Thibault rose fr hamstringing the Count, had seized that moment dig his hunting knife into his back.

CHAPTER XVIII

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

HE cold morning air brought Thibault back to consciousness; he tried to rise, but the extremity his pain held him bound. He was lying on his k, with no remembrance of what had happened, ing only the low grey sky above him. He made other effort, and turning, managed to lift himself his elbow. As he looked around him, he began recall the events of the previous night; he ognized the breach in the wall; and then there ne back to him the memory of the love meeting h the Countess and the desperate duel with the unt. The ground near him was red with blood, the Count was no longer there; no doubt, stocq, who had given him this fine blow that was ling him to the spot, had helped his master oors; Thibault they had left there, to die like a g, as far as they cared. He had it on the tip of tongue to hurl after them all the maledictory hes wherewith one would like to assail one's ellest enemy. But since Thibault had been no ger Thibault, and indeed during the remainder of time that he would still be the Baron Raoul, or least so in outward appearance, his demoniacal ver had been and would continue in abeyance. He had until nine o'clock that evening; but would live till then? This question gave rise in Thibault a very uneasy state of mind. If he were to die ore that hour, which of them would die, or the Baron? It seemed to him as likely to be as the other. What, however, disturbed and ered him most was his consciousness that the fortune which had befallen him was again owing

to his own fault. He remembered now that befo he had expressed the wish to be the Baron for fo and twenty hours, he had said some such words these:

"I should laugh, Raoul, if the Comte de Mo Gobert were to take you by surprise; you wo not get off so easily as if he were the Bail Magloire; there would be swords drawn, and blo given and received."

At last with a terrible effort, and suffering t while excruciating pain, Thibault succeeded dragging himself onto one knee. He could th make out people walking along a road not far on their way to market, and he tried to call them, but the blood filled his mouth and nea choked him. So he put his hat on the point of l knife and signalled to them like a shipwreck mariner, but his strength again failing, he once mo fell back unconscious. In a little while, however, again awoke to sensation; he appeared to be swayi from side to side as if in a boat. He opened l eyes; the peasants, it seemed, had seen him, a although not knowing who he was, had had co passion on this handsome young man lying cover with blood, and had concocted a sort of har barrow out of some branches, on which they we now carrying him to Villers-Cotterets. But by t time they reached Puiseux, the wounded man f that he could no longer bear the movement, a begged them to put him down in the first peasan hut they came to, and to send a doctor to him the The carriers took him to the house of the villa priest, and left him there, Thibault before th parted distributing gold among them from Raou purse, accompanied by many thanks for all th kind offices. The priest was away saying mass, b on returning and finding the wounded man, he utter loud cries of lamentation.

Had he been Raoul himself, Thibault could n have found a better hospital. The priest had at o time been Curé of Vauparfond, and while there h been engaged to give Raoul his first schoolin

ke all country priests, he knew, or thought he ew, something about doctoring; so he examined old pupil's wound. The knife had passed under shoulder-blade, through the right lung, and out tween the second and third ribs.

He did not for a moment disguise to himself the iousness of the wound, but he said nothing until doctor had been to see it. The latter arrived d after his examination, he turned and shook head.

'Are you going to bleed him?" asked the est.

'What would be the use?" asked the doctor. f it had been done at once after the wound was en, it might perhaps have helped to save him, it would be dangerous now to disturb the blood any way."

'Is there any chance for him?" asked the priest, o was thinking that the less there was for the ctor to do, the more there would be for the est.

'If his wound runs the ordinary course," said doctor, lowering his voice, "he will probably last out the day."

'You give him up then?"

'A doctor never gives up a patient, or at least he does so, he still trusts to the possibility of ure mercifully interfering on the patient's behalf: clot may form and stop the hæmorrage; a gh may disturb the clot, and the patient bleed death."

'You think then that it is my duty to prepare poor young man for death," asked the curate.

'I think," answered the doctor, shrugging his ulders, "you would do better to leave him alone; the first place because he is, at present, in a wsy condition and cannot hear what you say; r on, because he will be delirious, and unable to lerstand you." But the doctor was mistaken: wounded man, drowsy as he was, overheard conversation, more reassuring as regards the vation of his soul than the recovery of his body.

How many things people say in the presence sick persons, believing that they cannot hear, whi all the while, they are taking in every word! In t present case, this extra acuteness of hearing m perhaps have been due to the fact that it w Thibault's soul which was awake in Raoul's bod if the soul belonging to it had been in this body, would probably have succumbed more entirely to t effects of the wound.

The doctor now dressed the wound in the bac but left the front wound uncovered, merely directi that a piece of linen soaked in iced water shou be kept over it. Then, having poured some drc of a sedative into a glass of water, and telli the priest to give this to the patient whenever asked for drink, the doctor departed, saying th he would come again the following morning, b that he much feared he should take his journ for nothing.

Thibault would have liked to put in a word his own, and to say himself what he thought abo his condition, but his spirit was as if imprisoned this dying body, and, against his will, was forced submit to lying thus within its cell. But he co still hear the priest, who not only spoke to hi but endeavoured by shaking him to arouse him fr his lethargy. Thibault found this very fatigui and it was lucky for the priest that the woun man, just now, had no superhuman power, for inwardly sent the good man to the devil, many tir over.

Before long it seemed to him that some sort hot burning pan was being inserted under the so of his feet, his loins, his head; his blood began circulate, then to boil, like water over a fire. ideas became confused, his clenched jaws open his tongue which had been bound became loosen some disconnected words escaped him.

" Ah, ah! " he thought to himself, " this no do is what the good doctor spoke about as delirium and, for the while at least, this was his last li idea.

His whole life—and his life had really only existed ıce his first acquaintance with the black wolf—ssed before him. He saw himself following, and lling to hit the buck; saw himself tied to the oak-ee, and the blows of the strap falling on him; saw nself and the black wolf drawing up their compact; w himself trying to pass the devil's ring over gnelette's finger; saw himself trying to pull out e red hairs, which now covered a third of his ad. Then he saw himself on his way to pay court the pretty Madame Polet of the mill, meeting ndry, and getting rid of his rival; pursued by e farm servants, and followed by his wolves. He w himself making the acquaintance of Madame agloire, hunting for her, eating his share of the me, hiding behind the curtains, discovered by aître Magloire, flouted by the Baron of Vez, turned t by all three. Again he saw the hollow tree, th his wolves crouching around it and the owls rched on its branches, and heard the sounds of e approaching violins and hautboy and saw him-f looking, as Agnelette and the happy wedding rty went by. He saw himself the victim of angry alousy, endeavouring to fight against it by the lp of drink, and across his troubled brain came e recollection of François, of Champagne, and the nkeeper; he heard the galloping of Baron Raoul's rse, and he felt himself knocked down and rolling the muddy road. Then he ceased to see himself Thibault; in his stead arose the figure of the ndsome young rider whose form he had taken for while. Once more he was kissing Lisette, once ore his lips were touching the Countess's hand; en he was wanting to escape, but he found himself a cross-road where three ways only met, and each these was guarded by one of his victims: the first, the spectre of a drowned man, that was Marcotte; e second, by a young man dying of fever on a spital bed, that was Landry; the third, by a ounded man, dragging himself along on one knee, d trying in vain to stand up on his mutilated leg, at was the Comte de Mont-Gobert.

He fancied that, as all these things passed befo
him, he told the history of them one by one, and th
the priest, as he listened to this strange confessio
looked more like a dying man, was paler and mo
trembling than the man whose confession he w
listening to; that he wanted to give him absoluti
but that he, Thibault, pushed him away, shaki
his head, and that he cried out with a terrible laug
"I want no absolution! I am damned! damne
damned!"

And in the midst of all this hallucination, t
delirious madness, the spirit of Thibault could h
the priest's clock striking the hours, and as th
struck he counted them. Only this clock seemed
have grown to gigantic proportions and the face
it was the blue vault of heaven, and the numbers
it were flames; and the clock was called eterni
and the monstrous pendulum, as it swung backwa
and forwards called out in turn at every be
"Never! For ever!" And so he lay and he
the long hours of the day pass one by one; and th
at last the clock struck nine. At half-past nine,
Thibault, would have been Raoul, and Raoul wo
have been Thibault, for just four and twenty hou
As the last stroke of the hour died away, Thiba
felt the fever passing from him, it was succeeded
a sensation of coldness, which almost amounted
shivering. He opened his eyes, all trembling w
cold, and saw the priest at the foot of the bed say
the prayers for the dying, and the hands of
actual clock pointing to a quarter past nine.

His senses had become so acute that, impercept
as was their double movement, he could yet
both the larger and smaller one slowly creep
along; they were gradually nearing the critical hou
half-past nine! Although the face of the clock
in darkness, it seemed illuminated by some inw
light. As the minute hand approached the num
6, a spasm becoming every instant more and m
violent shook the dying man; his feet were like
and the numbness slowly, but steadily, mounted fr
the feet to the knees, from the knees to the thig

m the thighs to the lower part of the body. The eat was running down his forehead, but he had strength to wipe it away, nor even to ask to e it done. It was a sweat of agony which he w every moment might be the sweat of death. kinds of strange shapes, which had nothing of human about them, floated before his eyes; the ht faded away; wings as of bats seemed to lift body and carry it into some twilight region, ich was neither life nor death, but seemed a t of both. Then the twilight itself grew darker l darker; his eyes closed, and like a blind man mbling in the dark, his heavy wings seemed to against strange and unknown things. After that sank away into unfathomable depths, into tomless abysses, but still he heard the sound of ell.

he bell rang once, and scarcely had it ceased to rate when the dying man uttered a cry. The est rose and went to the side of the bed; with t cry the Baron Raoul had breathed his last; it exactly one second after the half hour after e.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DEAD AND THE LIVING

AT the same moment that the trembling sc of the young Baron passed away, Thibau awaking as if from an agitated sleep full of terril dreams, sat up in his bed. He was surrounded fire, every corner of his hut was in flames; at fi he thought it was a continuation of his nightma but then he heard cries of, " Death to the wizar death to the sorcerer! death to the were-wolf! and he understood that some terrible attack w being made upon him.

The flames came nearer, they reached the b he felt their heat upon him; a few seconds more a he would be burned alive in the midst of the flami pile. Thibault leaped from his bed, seized his bo spear, and dashed out of the back door of his h No sooner did his enemies see him rush throu the fire and emerge from the smoke than th cries of " death to him!" " death!" were redoubl One or two shots were fired at him; Thibault he the bullets whizz past; those who shot at him w the livery of the Grand Master, and Thibault called the menace of the Lord of Vez, utte against him a few days before.

He was then beyond the pale of the law; he co be smoked out of his hole like a fox; he could shot down like a buck. Luckily for Thibault, one of the bullets struck him, and as the circle fire made by the burning hut was not a large c he was soon safely beyond it, and once again shelter of the vast and gloomy forest, where,

not been for the cries of the menials who were ning down his house, the silence would have n as complete as the darkness. He sat down he foot of a tree and buried his head in his hands. e events of the last forty-eight hours had succded each other with such rapidity that there s no lack of matter to serve as subjects of ection to the shoemaker.

he twenty-four hours, during which he had d another existence than his own, seemed to like a dream, so much so that he would not e dared to take his oath that all this recent affair ween the Baron, and the Countess Jane, and the nte de Mont-Gobert had really taken place. The rch clock of Oigny struck ten, and he lifted his d. Ten o'clock! and only half an hour before had been still in the body of the Baron Raoul, e lay dying in the house of the Curé of Puiseux.

Ah!" he exclaimed, "I must find out for certain at has happened! It is not quite three miles to seux and I shall be there in half an hour; I uld like to ascertain if the Baron is really dead."

melancholy howl made answer to his words; he ked round; his faithful body-guards were back in; he had his pack about him once more.

Come, wolves! come, my only friends!" he d, "let us be off!" And he started with them ss the forest in the direction of Puiseux. The tsmen of the Lord of Vez, who were poking the remaining embers of the ruined hut, saw a pass, as in a vision, running at the head of ozen or more wolves. They crossed themselves, became more convinced than ever that Thibault a wizard. And anybody else who had seen bault, flying along as swiftly as his swiftest wolf, covering the ground between Oigny and seux in less than a quarter of an hour, would ainly have thought so too.

e stopped at the entrance to the village, and ing to his wolves, he said:

Friend wolves, I have no further need of you ight, and indeed I wish to be alone. Amuse

yourselves with the stables in the neighbourho
I give you leave to do just what you like; and
you chance to come across one of those two-foo
animals, called men, forget, friend wolves, that th
claim to be made in the image of their Creator, a
never fear to satisfy your appetite." Whereup
the wolves rushed off in different directions, utt
ing howls of joy, while Thibault went on into
village. The Curé's house adjoined the chur
and Thibault made a circuit so as to avoid pass
in front of the Cross. When he reached the pr
bytery, he looked in through one of the windo
and there he saw a bed with a lighted wax can
beside it; and over the bed itself was spread
sheet, and beneath the sheet could be seen
outlines of a figure lying rigid in death. There
peared to be no one in the house; the priest had
doubt gone to give notice of the death to the vill
authorities. Thibault went inside, and called
priest, but no one answered. He walked up to
bed, there could be no mistake about the b
under the sheet being that of a dead man; he li
the sheet, there could be no mistaking that
dead body was that of Raoul de Vauparfond.
his face lay the still, unearthly beauty which is b
of eternity. His features, which in life had b
somewhat too feminine for those of a man,
now assumed the sombre grandeur of death.
the first glance you might have thought he
slept; but on gazing longer you recognised in
immovable calm something more profound
sleep. The presence of one who carries a sc
for sceptre, and wears a shroud for mantle
unmistakable, and you knew that King Death
there.

Thibault had left the door open, and he h
the sound of light footsteps approaching; at
back of the alcove hung a serge curtain, w
masked a door by which he could retreat, if ne
sary, and he now went and placed himself be
it. A woman dressed in black, and covered wi
black veil, paused in some hesitation at the d

ıe head of another woman passed in front of hers d looked carefully round the room.

"I think it is safe for Madame to go in; I see one about, and besides, I will keep watch."

The woman in black went in, walked slowly wards the bed, stopped a moment to wipe the rspiration from her forehead, then, without ther hesitation, lifted the sheet which Thibault d thrown back over the face of the dead man; ıibault then saw that it was the Countess.

"Alas!" she said, "what they told me was ıe!"

Then she fell on her knees, praying and sobbing. er prayer being ended, she rose again, kissed e pale forehead of the dead, and the blue rks of the wound through which the soul had d.

"O my well-beloved, my Raoul!" she murmured, who will tell me the name of your murderer? o will help me to avenge your death?" As the untess finished speaking, she gave a cry and rted back; she seemed to hear a voice that swered, "I will!" and something had shaken green serge curtain.

The Countess however was no chicken-hearted man; she took the candle that was burning at head of the bed and went and looked behind curtain; but no creature was to be seen, a sed door was all that met her eye. She put back candle, took a pair of gold scissors from a le pocket case, cut off a curl of the dead man's r, placed the curl in a black velvet sachet which ıg over her heart, gave one last kiss to her d lover, laid the sheet over his face, and left house. Just as she was crossing the threshold, met the priest, and drawing back, drew her more closely over her face.

"Who are you?" asked the priest.

"I am Grief," she answered, and the priest made for her to pass.

The Countess and her attendant had come on t, and were returning in the same manner, for

the distance between Puiseux and Mont-Gobert w not much more than half a mile. When about h way along their road, a man, who had been hidi behind a willow tree, stepped forward and barr their further passage. Lisette screamed, but t Countess, without the least sign of fear, went to the man, and asked: "Who are you?"

"The man who answered 'I will' just no when you were asking who would denounce t murderer to you."

"And you can help me to revenge myself him?"

"Whenever you like."

"At once?"

"We cannot talk here very well."

"Where can we find a better place?"

"In your own room for one."

"We must not enter the Castle together."

"No; but I can go through the breach in park wall. Mademoiselle Lisette can wait for in the hut where Monsieur Raoul used to leave horse. She can take me up the winding stair into your room. If you should be in your dressi room, I will wait for you, as Monsieur Raoul wai the night before last."

The two women shuddered from head to foo

"Who are you to know all these details asked the Countess.

"I will tell you when the time comes for me tell you."

The Countess hesitated a moment, then, reco ing her resolution, she said:

"Very well then; come through the bre Lisette will wait for you in the stable."

"Oh! Madame," cried the maid, "I shall n dare to go and bring that man to you!"

"I will go myself then," said the Countess.

"Well said!" put in Thibault, "there spok woman worth calling one!" And so saying slid down into a kind of ravine beside the r and disappeared. Lisette very nearly fainted.

"Lean on me, my girl," said the Count

and let us walk on; I am anxious to hear what is man has to say to me."

The two women entered the Castle by way of e farm; no one had seen them go out, and no e saw them return. On reaching her room, the ountess waited for Lisette to bring up the stranger. en minutes had elapsed when the maid hurried with a pale face.

"Ah! Madame," she said, "there was no need r me to go to fetch him."

"What do you mean?" asked the Countess.

"Because he knew his way up as well as I did! nd oh! Madame! if you knew what he said to e! That man is the devil, Madame. I feel sure!"

"Show him in," said the Countess.

"I am here!" said Thibault.

"You can leave us now, my girl," said the ountess to Lisette. The latter quitted the room d the Countess remained alone with Thibault. hibault's appearance was not one to inspire con- lence. He gave the impression of a man who d once and for all made up his mind, but it was so easy to see that it was for no good purpose; Satanic smile played about his mouth, and there s a demoniacal light in his eyes. He had made attempt to hide his red hairs, but had left them fiantly uncovered, and they hung over his fore- ad like a plume of flame. But still the Countess oked him full in the face without changing colour.

"My maid says that you know the way to my om; have you ever been here before?"

"Yes, Madame, once."

"And when was that?"

"The day before yesterday."

"At what time?"

"From half-past ten till half-past twelve at ght."

The Countess looked steadily at him and said:

"That is not true."

"Would you like me to tell you what took ace?"

"During the time you mention?"

"During the time I mention."

"Say on," replied the Countess, laconically.

Thibault was equally laconic.

"Monsieur Raoul came in by that door," said, pointing to the one leading into the corrido "and Lisette left him here alone. You enter the room by that one," he continued, indicating t dressing-room door, "and you found him on l knees. Your hair was unbound, only fastened ba by three diamond pins, you wore a pink s dressing-gown, trimmed with lace, pink silk stoc ings, cloth-of-silver slippers and a chain of pea round your neck."

"You describe my dress exactly," said t Countess, "continue."

"You tried to pick a quarrel with Monsie Raoul, first because he loitered in the corridors kiss your waiting-maid; secondly, because someo had met him late at night on the road betwe Erneville and Villers-Cotterets; thirdly, because, the ball given at the Castle, at which you yours were not present, he danced four times with Madai de Bonneuil."

"Continue."

"In answer to your accusations, your lover ma excuses for himself, some good, some bad; yc however, were satisfied with them for you we just forgiving him when Lisette rushed in full alarm calling to Monsieur Raoul to escape, as yc husband had just returned."

"Lisette was right, you can be nothing less th the devil," said the Countess with a sinister lau "and I think we shall be able to do business gether. . . . Finish your account."

"Then you and your maid together push Monsieur Raoul, who resisted, into the dressi room; Lisette forced him along the corridors a through two or three rooms; they then went do a winding staircase in the wing of the Cas opposite to the one by which they had gone On arriving at the foot of the staircase, fugitives found the door locked; then they

a kind of office where Lisette opened the dow, which was about seven or eight feet above ground. Monsieur Raoul leaped down out of window, ran to the stable, found his horse still re, but hamstrung; then he swore that if he met Count at any time he would hamstring him as Count had hamstrung his horse, for he thought cowardly act to injure a poor beast so unneces- ily. Then he went on foot to the breach, climbed and found the Count awaiting him outside the k, with his sword drawn. The Baron had his nting knife with him; he drew it, and the duel gan."

'Was the Count alone?"

'Wait . . . the Count appeared to be alone; er the fourth or fifth pass the Count was wounded the shoulder, and sank on one knee, crying: elp, Lestocq!' Then the Baron remembered his h, and hamstrung the Count as he had ham- ung the horse; but as the Baron rose, Lestocq ve his knife into his back; it passed under the ulder blade and out through the chest. I need not you where . . . you kissed the wound yourself."

'And after that?"

'The Count and his huntsman returned to the stle, leaving the Baron lying helpless; when the ter came to, he made signs to some passing asants, who put him on a litter, and bore him ay, with the intention of taking him to Villers- tterets; but he was in such pain that they could carry him farther than Puiseux; there they laid n on the bed where you found him, and on which breathed his last a second after the half hour er nine in the evening."

The Countess rose, and without speaking, went her jewel-case and took out the pearls she had rn two nights before. She handed them to ibault.

'What are they for?" he asked.

'Take them," said the Countess, "they are rth fifty thousand livres."

'Are you still anxious for revenge?"

"Yes," replied the Countess.

"Revenge will cost more than that."

"How much will it cost?"

"Wait for me to-morrow night," said Thibau "and I will tell you."

"Where shall I await you?" asked the Counte

"Here," said Thibault, with the leer of a w animal.

"I will await you here," said the Countess.

"Till to-morrow then."

"Till to-morrow."

Thibault went out. The Countess went and placed the pearls in her dressing-case; lifted up false bottom, and drew from underneath it a sm bottle containing an opal-coloured liquid, and little dagger with a jewelled handle and case a a blade inlaid with gold. She hid both beneath h pillow, knelt at her prie-dieu, and, her pray finished, threw herself dressed on to her bed. . .

CHAPTER XX

TRUE TO TRYST

N quitting the Countess's room, Thibault had left the Castle by the way which he had cribed to her, and soon found himself safe ond its walls and outside the park. And now, the first time in his life, Thibault had really vhere to go. His hut was burnt, he was with- a friend, and like Cain, he was a wanderer on face of the earth. He turned to the unfailing lter of the forest, and there made his way to the er end of Chavigny; as the day was breaking he ıe across a solitary house, and asked if he could some bread. The woman belonging to it, her band being away, gave him some, but refused eceive payment for it; his appearance frightened . Having now food sufficient for the day, Thi- lt returned to the forest, with the intention of ıding his time till evening in a part which knew between Fleury and Longpont, where the s were especially thick and tall. As he was king for a resting-place behind a rock, his eye attracted by a shining object lying at the om of a slope, and his curiosity led him to climb n and see what it was. The shining object was silver badge belonging to a huntsman's shoulder ; the shoulder belt was slung round the neck of ead body, or rather of a skeleton, for the flesh been entirely eaten off the bones, which were lean as if prepared for an anatomist's study or inter's studio. The skeleton looked as if it had lain there since the preceding night.

"Ah! ah!" said Thibault, "this is probal the work of my friends, the wolves; th evidently profited by the permission which I ga them."

Curious to know if possible who the victim w he examined it more closely; his curiosity was so satisfied, for the badge, which the wolves had doubt rejected as less easily digestible than the re was lying on the chest of the skeleton, like a tic on a bale of goods.

J. B. Lestocq,
Head Keeper to the Comte de Mont-Gobert.

"Well done!" laughed Thibault, "here is c at least who did not live long to enjoy the res of his murderous act."

Then, contracting his brow, he muttered to hi self, in a low voice, and this time without laughin

"Is there perhaps, after all, what people cal Providence?"

Lestocq's death was not difficult to account f He had probably been executing some order his master that night, and on the road betwe Mont-Gobert and Longpont, had been attacked wolves. He had defended himself with the sa knife with which he had wounded the Baron, Thibault found the knife a few paces off, at a sp where the ground showed traces of a sev struggle; at last, being disarmed, the ferocio beasts had dragged him into the hollow, and th devoured him.

Thibault was becoming so indifferent to eve thing that he felt neither pleasure nor regr neither satisfaction nor remorse, at Lestocq's dea all he thought was, that it simplified matters the Countess, as she would now only have l husband upon whom she need revenge hers Then he went and found a place where the ro afforded him the best shelter from the wind, a prepared to spend his day there in peace. Towa

idday, he heard the horn of the Lord of Vez, and e cry of his hounds; the mighty huntsman was ter game, but the chase did not pass near enough Thibault to disturb him.

At last the night came. At nine o'clock Thibault se and set out for the Castle of Mont-Gobert. e found the breach, followed the path he knew, d came to the little hut where Lisette had been vaiting him on the night when he had come in e guise of Raoul. The poor girl was there this ening, but alarmed and trembling. Thibault shed to carry out the old traditions and tried to ss her, but she sprang back with visible signs of ar.

"Do not touch me," she said, "or I shall call t."

"Oh, indeed! my pretty one," said Thibault, you were not so sour-tempered the other day with e Baron Raoul."

"Maybe not," said the girl, "but a great many ngs have happened since the other day."

"And many more to happen still!" said Thibault a lively tone.

"I think," said the waiting-maid in a mournful ice, "that the climax is already reached." Then, she went on in front, "If you wish to come," e added, "follow me."

Thibault followed her; Lisette, without the ghtest effort at concealment, walked straight oss the open space that lay between the trees and Castle.

"You are courageous to-day," said Thibault, nd supposing someone were to see us. . . ."

"There is no fear now," she answered, "the es that could have seen us are all closed."

Although he did not understand what the young l meant by these words, the tone in which they re spoken made Thibault shiver.

He continued to follow her in silence as they went the winding stairs to the first floor. As Lisette l her hand on the key of the door, Thibault ldenly stopped her. Something in the silence of

the Castle filled him with fear; it seemed as i curse might have fallen on the place.

"Where are we going?" said Thibault, scar knowing himself what he said.

"You know well enough, surely."

"Into the Countess's room?"

"Into the Countess's room."

"She is waiting for me?"

"She is waiting for you." And Lisette ope the door. "Go in," she said.

Thibault went in, and Lisette shut the d behind him and waited outside.

It was the same exquisite room, lighted in same manner, filled with the same sweet sc Thibault looked round for the Countess, he expe to see her appear at the dressing-room door, the door remained closed. Not a sound was to heard in the room, except the ticking of the Sè clock, and the beating of Thibault's heart. began to look about him with a feeling of shud ing fear for which he could not account; then eyes fell on the bed; the Countess was lying as upon it. In her hair were the same diamond p round her neck the same pearls; she was dre in the same pink silk dressing-gown, and had on same little slippers of cloth of silver which she worn to receive the Baron Raoul.

Thibault went up to her; the Countess did stir.

"You are sleeping, fair Countess?" he s leaning over to look at her.

But all at once, he started upright, staring be him, his hair standing on end, the sweat breal out on his forehead. The terrible truth was be ning to dawn upon him; was the Countess slee the sleep of this world or of eternity?

He fetched a light from the mantelpiece, and trembling hand, held it to the face of the myster sleeper. It was pale as ivory, with the deli veins traced over the temples, and the lips still A drop of pink burning wax fell on this still fac sleep; it did not awake the Countess.

" Ah! " cried Thibault, " what is this? " and he ut down the candle, which his shaking hand could o longer hold, on the night-table.

The Countess lay with her arms stretched out ose to her sides; she appeared to be clasping omething in either hand. With some effort, hibault was able to open the left one; within it e found the little bottle, which she had taken from er dressing-case the night before. He opened the ther hand; within it lay a piece of paper on which ere written these few words: " True to tryst "— es, true and faithful unto death, for the Countess as dead!

All Thibault's illusions were fading one after the ther, like the dreams of the night which gradually ade away, as the sleeper becomes more and more oroughly awake. There was a difference, however, for other men find their dead alive again in eir dreams; but with Thibault, his dead did not rise and walk, but remained lying for ever in their st sleep.

He wiped his forehead, went to the door leading to the corridor, and opened it, to find Lisette on er knees, praying.

" Is the Countess dead then? " asked Thibault.

" The Countess is dead, and the Count is dead."

" From the effect of the wounds given him by e Baron Raoul? "

" No, from the blow with the dagger given him the Countess."

" Ah!" said Thibault, grimacing hideously in his fort to force a laugh in the midst of this grim rama, " all this tale you hint at is new to me."

Then Lisette told him the tale in full. It was a ain tale, but a terrible one.

The Countess had remained in bed part of the y, listening to the village bells of Puiseux, which ere tolling as the Baron's body was being borne om thence to Vauparfond, where he was to be id in the family grave. Towards four o'clock the ells ceased; then the Countess rose, took the agger from under her pillow, hid it in her breast,

and went towards her husband's room. She found the valet in attendance in good spirits; the doctor had just left, having examined the wound, and declared the Count's life out of danger.

"Madame will agree that it is a thing to rejoice at!" said the valet.

"Yes, to rejoice at indeed."

And the Countess went on into her husband's room. Five minutes later she left it again.

"The Count is sleeping," she said, "do not go in until he calls."

The valet bowed and sat down in the ante-room to be in readiness at the first call from his master. The Countess went back to her room.

"Undress me, Lisette," she said to her waiting maid, "and give me the clothes that I had on the last time *he* came."

The maid obeyed; we have already seen how every detail of toilet was arranged exactly as it had been on that fatal night. Then the Countess wrote a few words on a piece of paper, which she folded and kept in her right hand. After that, she lay down on her bed.

"Will Madame not take anything?" asked the maid.

The Countess opened her left hand, and showed her a little bottle she was holding inside it.

"Yes, Lisette," she said, "I am going to take what is in this bottle."

"What, nothing but that!" said Lisette.

"It will be enough, Lisette; for after I have taken it, I shall have need of nothing more." And as she spoke, she put the bottle to her mouth and drank the contents at a draught. Then she said: "You saw that man, Lisette, who waited for us in the road; I have a meeting with him this evening, here in my room, at half-past nine. You know where to go and wait for him, and you will bring him here. I do not wish that anyone should be able to say that I was not true to my word, even after I am dead."

Thibault had nothing to say; the agreement made

tween them had been kept. Only the Countess d accomplished her revenge herself, single-nded, as everyone understood, when the valet eling uneasy about his master, and going softly o his room to look at him, found him lying on s back with a dagger in his heart; and then hurry-g to tell Madame what had happened, found the untess dead also.

The news of this double death soon spread rough the Castle, and all the servants had fled, ying that the exterminating Angel was in the stle; the waiting-maid alone remained to carry t her dead mistress's wishes.

Thibault had nothing more to do at the Castle, he left the Countess on her bed, with Lisette ar her, and went downstairs. As Lisette had id, there was no fear now of meeting either master servants; the servants had run away, the master d mistress were dead. Thibault once more made r the breach in the wall. The sky was dark, and it had not been January, you might have im-ined a thunder storm was brewing; there was rely light enough to see the footpath, as he went ong. Once or twice Thibault paused; he fancied had detected the sound of the dry branches acking under someone's footsteps keeping pace th his, both to right and left.

Having come to the breach, Thibault distinctly ard a voice say: "that's the man!" and at the me moment, two gendarmes, concealed on the rther side of the wall, seized Thibault by the llar, while two others came up behind.

It appeared that Cramoisi, jealous with regard Lisette, had been prowling about at nights on e watch, and had, only the evening before, ticed a strange man come in and go out of the rk along the more secluded paths, and he had ported the fact to the head of police. When the cent serious events that had taken place at the astle became generally known, orders were given send four men and take up any suspicious-looking erson seen prowling about. Two of the men,

with Cramoisi for guide, had taken ambush on t farther side of the breach, and the two others h dogged Thibault through the park. Then as have seen, at the signal given by Cramoisi, th had all four fallen upon him as he issued from t gap.

There was a long and obstinate struggle; T bault was not a man that even four others cou overcome without difficulty; but he had no weap by him, and his resistance was therefore usele The gendarmes had been more bent on securi him, on account of having recognized that it w Thibault, and Thibault was beginning to earn very bad name, so many misfortunes having becor associated with it; so Thibault was knocked dow and finally bound and led off between two mount men. The other two gendarmes walked one front, and one behind. Thibault had mere struggled out of a natural feeling of self-defen and pride, for his power to inflict evil was, as know, unlimited, and he had but to wish h assailants dead, and they would have fallen lifele at his feet. But he thought there was time enou for that; as long as there still remained a wish him, he could escape from man's justice, ev though he were at the foot of the scaffold.

So Thibault, securely bound, his hands tied, a fetters upon his feet, walked along between his fo gendarmes, apparently in a state of resignatio One of the gendarmes held the end of the ro with which he was bound, and the four men ma jokes and laughed at him, asking the wizar Thibault, why, being possessed of such power, had allowed himself to be taken. And Thibau replied to their scoffings with the well-know Proverb: "He laughs best who laughs last," a the gendarmes expressed a wish that they might b the ones to do so.

On leaving Puiseux behind, they came to th forest. The weather was growing more and mo threatening; the dark clouds hung so low that th trees looked as if they were holding up a huge blac

eil, and it was impossible to see four steps ahead. ut he, Thibault, saw—saw lights swiftly passing, nd crossing one another, in the darkness on either de. Closer and closer drew the lights, and attering footfalls were heard among the dry aves. The horses grew restive, shied and snorted, iffing the air and trembling beneath their ders, while the coarse laughter of the men themlves died down. It was Thibault's turn to laugh ow.

"What are you laughing at?" asked one of the endarmes.

"I am laughing at your having left off laughing," id Thibault.

The lights drew nearer, and the footfalls became ore distinct, at the sound of Thibault's voice. hen a more ominous sound was heard, a sound teeth striking together, as jaws opened and ut.

"Yes, yes, my friends," said Thibault, "you ve tasted human flesh, and you found it good."

He was answered by a low growl of approbation, lf like a dog's, and half like a hyena's.

"Quite so," said Thibault, "I understand; after ving made a meal of a keeper, you would not ind tasting a gendarme."

The gendarmes themselves were beginning to udder with fear. "To whom are you talking?" ey asked him.

"To those who can answer me," said Thibault; d he gave a howl. Twenty or more howls sponded, some from close at hand, some from rther off.

"H'm!" said one of the gendarmes, "what are ese beasts that are following us? this good-forthing seems to understand their language!"

"What!" said the shoemaker, "you take ibault the wolf-master prisoner, you carry him rough the forest at night, and then you ask whate the lights and the howls that follow him! . . . o you hear, friends?" cried Thibault, "these ntlemen are asking who you are. Answer them,

all of you together, that they may have no furth doubt on the matter."

The wolves, obedient to their master's voic gave one prolonged, unanimous howl. The hors panted and shivered, and one or two of them reare The gendarmes endeavoured to calm their animal patting and gentling them.

"That is nothing," said Thibault, "wait till yo see each horse with two wolves hanging on to i hind-quarters and another at its throat."

The wolves now came in between the horses' leg and began caressing Thibault; one of them stoo up, and put its front paws on Thibault's chest, if asking for orders.

"Presently, presently," said Thibault, "there plenty of time; do not be selfish, give your comrad time to come up."

The men could no longer control their horse which were rearing and shying, and although goir at a foot's pace, were streaming with sweat.

"Do you not think," said Thibault, "you wou do best now to come to terms with me? That i if you were to let me free on condition that you sleep in your beds to-night."

"Go at a walking pace," said one of the gen armes, "as long as we do that, we have nothir to fear."

Another one drew his sword. A second or tv later there was a howl of pain; one of the wolv had seized hold of this gendarme's boot, and t latter had pierced him through with his weapon.

"I call that a very imprudent thing to do," sa Thibault; "the wolves eat each other, whatever t proverb may say, and once having tasted bloo I do not know that even I shall have the power hold them back."

The wolves threw themselves in a body on the wounded comrade, and in five minutes there w nothing left of its carcase but the bare bones. T gendarmes had profited by this respite to get ahead, but without releasing Thibault, whom th obliged to run alongside of them; what he h

reseen, however, happened. There was a sudden und as of an approaching hurricane—the whole ck was in pursuit, following them up at full llop. The horses, having once started trotting, used to go at a walking pace again, and ghtened by the trampling, the smell, and the wls, now set off galloping, in spite of their riders' orts to hold them in. The man who had hold of rope, now requiring both hands to master his rse, let go of Thibault, and the wolves leaped on the horses, clinging desperately to the cruppers d withers and throats of the terrified animals. sooner had the latter felt the sharp teeth of ir assailants than they scattered, rushing in ry direction.

"Hurrah, wolves! hurrah!" cried Thibault. But fierce animals had no need of encouragement, l soon each horse had six or seven more wolves pursuit of him.

Horses and wolves disappeared, some one way, ne the other, and the men's cries of distress, the onized neighings of the horses, and the furious wls of the wolves became gradually fainter and nter as they travelled farther away.

Thibault was left free once more, and alone. His ds however were still bound, and his feet fettered. st he tried to undo the cord with his teeth, but he found impossible. Then he tried to wrench bonds apart by the power of his muscles, but t too was unavailing; the only result of his rts was to make the cord cut into his flesh. It his turn to bellow with pain and anger. At , tired of trying to wrest his hands free, he d them, bound as they were, to heaven, and d:

Oh! black wolf! friend, let these cords that bind be loosened; thou knowest well that it is only lo evil that I wish for my hands to be free."

nd at the same moment his fetters were broken fell to the ground, and Thibault beat his hands ether with another roar, this time of joy.

CHAPTER XXI

THE GENIUS OF EVIL

THE next evening, about nine o'clock, a m might be seen walking along the Puits-Sarra road and making for the Osiéres forest-path.

It was Thibault, on his way to pay a last vi to the hut, and to see if any remains of it had be left by the fire. A heap of smoking cinders alo marked the place where it had stood; and Thibault came in sight of it, he saw the wolves, if he had appointed them to meet him there, for ing an immense circle round the ruins, and looki upon them with an expression of mournful ang They seemed to understand that by destroying t poor hut, made of earth and branches, the one wh by the compact with the black wolf, had been giv them for master, had been made a victim. Thibault entered the circle, all the wolves ga simultaneously a long and sinister sounding howl, if to make him understand that they were ready help in avenging him.

Thibault went and sat down on the spot wh the hearth had stood; it was recognizable from few blackened stones still remaining, which w otherwise uninjured, and by a higher heap of cind just at that spot. He stayed there some minut absorbed in his unhappy thoughts. But he was reflecting that the ruin which he saw around h was the consequence and the punishment of jealous and covetous desires, which had gone gathering strength. He felt neither repentance regret. That which dominated all other feeling

ı was his satisfaction at the thought of being ıceforth able to render to his fellow-creatures evil evil, his pride in having, thanks to his terrible ciliaries, the power to fight against those who secuted him.

\nd as the wolves continued their melancholy vling: "Yes, my friends," said Thibault, "yes, ır howls answer to the cry of my heart. . . . My ow-creatures have destroyed my hut, they have t to the winds the ashes of the tools wherewith arned my daily bread; their hatred pursues me it pursues you, I expect from them neither mercy pity. We are their enemies as they are ours; I will have neither mercy nor compassion on m. Come then, let us go from this hut to the stle, and carry thither the desolation which they e brought home to me."

\nd then the master of the wolves, like a chief banditti followed by his desperadoes, set off with pack in quest of pillage and carnage.

This time it was neither red-deer, nor fallow-deer, any timid game of which they were in pursuit. eltered by the darkness of the night Thibault t directed his course to the Château of Vez, there was lodged his chief enemy. The Baron l three farms belonging to the estate, stables ed with horses, and byres filled with cows, and park was full of sheep. All these places were acked the first night, and on the morrow two rses, four cows, and ten sheep were found killed. The Baron was doubtful at first if this could be work of the beasts against which he waged fierce a warfare; there seemed something parıing rather of intelligence and revenge in it than the mere unreasoning attacks of a pack of wild mals. Still it seemed manifest that the wolves st have been the aggressors, judging by the rks of teeth on the carcases and the footprints on the ground. Next night the Baron set tchers to lie in wait, but Thibault and his wolves re at work on the farther side of the forest. This e it was the stables and parks of Soucy and

of Vivières which were decimated, and the follo ing night those of Boursonnes and Yvors. T work of annihilation, once begun, must be carri out with desperate determination, and the mast never left his wolves now; he slept with them their dens, and lived in the midst of them, stimula ing their thirst for blood.

Many a woodman, many a heath-gatherer, ca face to face in the thickets with the menacing whi teeth of a wolf, and was either carried off and eate or just saved his life by the aid of his courage a his bill-hook. Guided by a human intelligence, t wolves had become organised and disciplined, a were far more formidable than a band of d contented soldiery let loose in a conquered countr

The terror of them became general; no o dared go beyond the towns and villages unarme horses and cattle were all fed inside the stable and the men themselves, their work done, wait for one another, so as not to go about singly. T Bishop of Soissons ordered public prayer to made, asking God to send a thaw, for the unusu ferocity of the wolves was attributed to the gre quantity of snow that had fallen. But the repo also went about that the wolves were incited their work and led about by a man; that this m was more indefatigable, more cruel and insatiab than the wolves themselves; that in imitation of h companions he ate raw flesh and quenched his thir in blood. And the people went further and sa that this man was Thibault.

The Bishop pronounced sentence of excommun cation against the former shoemaker. The Lo of Vez, however, had little faith in the thunders the Church being of much effect, unless support by some well-conducted hunting. He was som what cast down at so much blood being spilt, and h pride was sorely hurt that his, the Grand Master' own cattle should have suffered so heavily from t very wolves he was specially appointed to destroy.

At the same time, he could not but feel a sec delight, at the thought of the triumphant vie

loos in store for him, and of the fame which he ıld not fail to win among all sportsmen of repute. s passion for the chase, excited by the way in ich his adversaries the wolves had so openly ered upon the struggle, became absolutely overwering; he allowed neither respite nor repose; took no sleep himself and ate his meals in the dle. All night long he scoured the country in npany with l'Eveillé and Engoulevent, who, in nsideration of his marriage had been raised to rank of pricker, and the dawn had no sooner peared before he was again in the saddle, ready start and chase the wolf until it was too dark to tinguish the hounds. But alas! all his knowge of the art of Venery, all his courage, all his severance, were lost labour. He occasionally ought down some wretched cub, some miserable st eaten with mange, some imprudent glutton ich had so gorged itself with carnage that its ath would not hold out after an hour or two's ı; but the larger, well-grown wolves, with their ck dark coats, their muscles like steel springs l their long slender feet—not one of these lost air in the war that was being made upon them. anks to Thibault they met their enemies in arms nearly equal ground.

ıs the Baron of Vez remained for ever with his gs, so did Thibault with his wolves; after a night sack and pillage, he kept the pack awake on the ch to help the one that the Baron had started. s wolf again, following Thibault's instructions, recourse at first to stratagem. It doubled, ssed its tracks, waded in the streams, leaped up the bending trees so as to make it more difficult for huntsmen and hounds to follow the scent, finally when it felt its powers failing, it adopted der measures and went straight ahead. Then other wolves and their master intervened; at least sign of hesitation on the part of the hounds, y managed so cleverly to put them on the wrong nt that it required an experienced eye to detect t the dogs were not all following up the same

track, and nothing less than the Baron's profour knowledge could decide which was the right on Even he sometimes was mistaken.

Again, the wolves in their turn followed th huntsmen; it was a pack hunting a pack; only th one hunted in silence, which made it far the mo formidable of the two. Did a tired hound fa behind, or another get separated from the ma body, it was seized and killed in an instant, ar Engoulevent, whom we have had occasion t mention several times before, and who had take poor Marcotte's place, having hastened one day t the help of one of his hounds that was uttering cri of distress, was himself attacked, and only owe his life to the swiftness of his horse.

It was not long before the Baron's pack wa decimated; his best hounds were nearly dead wit fatigue, and his more second-rate ones had perishe by the wolves' teeth. The stable was in no bett condition than the kennel; Bayard was foundere Tancred had sprained a tendon leaping over a ditc and a strained fetlock had placed Valourous c the list of invalids. Sultan, luckier than his thre companions, had fallen honourably on the field battle, having succumbed to a sixteen hours' ru under the weight of his gigantic master, who nev for a moment lost courage, notwithstanding th fact that the dead bodies of his finest and mo faithful servitors lay heaped around him.

The Baron, following the example of the nobl hearted Romans who exhausted the resources military art against the Carthaginians who were fo ever reappearing as enemies, the Baron, I repea changed his tactics and tried what battues cou accomplish. He called on all available men amon the peasants, and beat up the game throughout th forest with such a formidable number of men th not so much as a hare was left in its form ne any spot which they had passed.

But Thibault made it his business to find o beforehand where these battues were going to tak place, and if he ascertained that the beaters we

the side of the forest towards Viviers or Soucy, and his wolves made an excursion to Boursonnes Yvors; and if the Baron and his men were busy r Haramont or Longpré, the people of Corcy l Vertefeuille were made painfully aware of ibault and his wolves.

n vain the Lord of Vez drew his cordon at night nd the suspected enclosures, so as to begin the ack with daylight; never once did his men succeed starting a wolf, for not once did Thibault make nistake in his calculations. If by chance he had been well informed, and was uncertain in what ection the Baron and his men were going, he led all his wolves together, sending express riers after them as the night set in; he then led m unobserved down the wooded lane leading to art l'Abbesse, which at that time ran between forest of Compiègne and the forest of Villers-tterets, and so was able to pass from one to the er. This state of things went on for several nths. Both the Baron and Thibault carried out task each had set before himself with equally sionate energy; the latter, like his adversary, med to have acquired some supernatural power, ereby he was able to resist fatigue and excite-nt; and this was the more remarkable seeing that ing the short intervals of respite accorded by Lord of Vez, the Wolf-leader was by no means peace in himself.

t was not that the terrible deeds in which he s an active agent, and at which he presided, d him exactly with horror, for he thought them tifiable; he threw the responsibility of them, he l, on to those who had forced him to commit m. But there were moments of failing spirit, for ich he could not account, when he went about in midst of his ferocious companions feeling gloomy, rose and heavy-hearted. Again the image of nelette would rise before him, seeming to him the personification of his own past life, honest l laborious, peaceful and innocent. And more n that, he felt he loved her more than he had

ever thought it possible for him to love anybody. At times he would weep at the thought of all his lost happiness, at others he was seized with a wild fit of jealousy against the one to whom she now belonged—she, who at one time, might if he had liked, have been his.

One day the Baron, in order to prepare some fresh means of destruction, had been forced for the while to leave the wolves in peace. Thibault, who was in one of the moods we have just described, wandered forth from the den where he lived in company with the wolves. It was a splendid summer's night, and he began to rove about the woodlands, where the moon was lighting up the trunks of the trees, dreaming of the time when he trod the mossy carpet underfoot free from trouble and anxiety, until at last the only happiness which was now left him, forgetfulness of the present, stole over his senses. Lost in this sweet dream of his earlier life, he was all of a sudden aroused by a cry of distress from somewhere near at hand. He was now so accustomed to such sounds, that, ordinarily, he would have paid no attention to it, but his heart was for the moment softened by the recollection of Agnelette, and he felt more disposed than usual to pity; as it happened also he was near the place where he had first seen the gentle child, and this helped to awaken his kinder nature.

He ran to the spot whence the cry had come, and as he leaped from the underwood into the deep forest-lane near Ham, he saw a woman struggling with an immense wolf which had thrown her on the ground. Thibault could not have said why he was so agitated at this sight, nor why his heart beat more violently than usual; he rushed forward and seizing the animal by the throat hurled it away from the victim, and then lifting the woman in his arms, he carried her to the side of the lane and laid her on the slope. Here a ray of moonlight, breaking through the clouds, fell on the face of the woman he had saved, and Thibault saw that it was Agnelette. Near to the spot was the spring in

which Thibault had once gazed at himself, and had seen the first red hair; he ran to it, took up water in his hands, and threw it into the woman's face. Agnelette opened her eyes, gave a cry of terror, and tried to rise and flee.

"What!" cried the Wolf-leader, as if he were still Thibault the shoemaker, "you do not know me again, Agnelette?"

"Ah! yes indeed, I know you, Thibault; and it is because I know who you are," cried the young woman, "that I am afraid!" Then throwing herself on her knees, and clasping her hands: "Oh do not kill me, Thibault!" she cried, "do not kill me! it would be such dreadful trouble for the poor old grandmother! Thibault, do not kill me!"

The Wolf-leader stood overcome with consternation; up to this hour he had not fully realized the hideous renown which he had gained; but the terror which the sight of him inspired in the woman who had loved him and whom he still loved, filled him with a horror of himself.

"I, kill you, Agnelette!" he said, "just when I have snatched you from death! Oh! how you must hate and despise me for such a thought to enter your head."

"I do not hate you, Thibault," said the young woman, "but I hear such things about you, that I feel afraid of you."

"And do they say nothing of the infidelity which has led Thibault to commit such crimes?"

"I do not understand you," said Agnelette, looking at Thibault with her large eyes, blue as the heavens.

"What!" exclaimed Thibault, "you do not understand that I loved you—that I adored you, Agnelette, and that the loss of you sent me out of my mind?"

"If you loved me, if you adored me, Thibault, what prevented you from marrying me?"

"The spirit of evil," muttered Thibault.

"I too loved you," continued the young woman, "and I suffered cruelly waiting for you."

Thibault heaved a sigh.

"You loved me, Agnelette?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the young woman with her soft voice and gentle eyes.

"But now, all is over," said Thibault, "and you love me no more."

"Thibault," answered Agnelette, "I no longer love you, because it is no longer right to love you; but one cannot always forget one's first love as one would wish."

"Agnelette!" cried Thibault, trembling all over, "be careful what you say!"

"Why should I be careful what I say, since it is the truth," said the girl with an innocent shake of the head. "The day you told me that you wished to make me your wife, I believed you, Thibault; for why should I think that you would lie to me when I had just done you a service? Then later, I met you, but I did not go in search of you; you came to me, you spoke words of love to me, you were the first to refer to the promise that you had made me. And it was not my fault either, Thibault, that I was afraid of that ring which you wore, which was large enough for you and yet, oh, it was horrible! not big enough for one of my fingers."

"Would you like me not to wear this ring any more?" said Thibault. "Would you like me to throw it away?" And he began trying to pull it off his finger, but as it had been too small to go on Agnelette's finger, so now it was too small to be taken off Thibault's. In vain he struggled with it, and tried to move it with his teeth; the ring seemed riveted to his finger for all eternity.

Thibault saw that it was no use trying to get rid of it; it was a token of compact between himself and the black wolf, and with a sigh he let his arms fall hopelessly to his sides.

"That day," went on Agnelette, "I ran away; I know that I was wrong to do so, but I was no longer mistress of myself after seeing that ring and more still. . . ." She lifted her eyes as she spoke,

looking timidly up at Thibault's hair. Thibault was bare-headed, and, by the light of the moon Agnelette could see that it was no longer a single hair that shone red as the flames of hell, but that half the hair on Thibault's head was now of this devil's colour.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, drawing back, "Thibault! Thibault! What has happened to you since I last saw you?"

"Agnelette!" cried Thibault throwing himself down with his face to the ground, and holding his head between his hands, "I could not tell any human creature, not even a priest, what has happened to me since then; but to Agnelette, all I can say is: Agnelette! Agnelette! have pity on me, for I have been most unhappy!"

Agnelette went up to him and took his hands in hers.

"You did love me then? You did love me?" he cried.

"What can I do, Thibault!" said the girl with the same sweetness and innocence as before. "I took you at your word, and every time I heard someone knocking at our hut door, I thought it was you come to say to the old grandmother, 'Mother, I love Agnelette, Agnelette loves me; will you give her to me for my wife?' Then when I went and opened the door, and found that it was not you, I used to go into a corner and cry."

"And now, Agnelette, now?"

"Now," she answered. "Now, Thibault, it may seem strange, but in spite of all the terrible tales that are told about you, I have not been really frightened; I was sure that you could not wish any harm to me, and I was walking boldly through the forest when that dreadful beast from which you saved me suddenly sprang upon me."

"But how is it that you are near your old home? do you not live with your husband?"

"We lived together for a while at Vez, but there was no room there for the grandmother; and so I said to my husband, 'the grandmother must be

thought of first; I must go back to her; when you wish to see me you will come.' "

"And he consented to that arrangement?"

"Not at first, but I pointed out to him that the grandmother is seventy years of age; that if she were only to live another two or three years, God grant it may be more! it would only be two or three years of some extra trouble for us, whereas, in all probability we had long years of life before us. Then he understood that it was right to give to those that had least."

But all the while that Agnelette was giving this explanation, Thibault could think of nothing but that the love she once had for him was not yet dead.

"So," said Thibault, "you loved me? and so, Agnelette, you could love me again . . . ?"

"That is impossible now because I belong to another."

"Agnelette, Agnelette! only say that you love me!"

"No, Thibault, if I loved you, I should do everything in the world to hide it from you."

"And why?" cried Thibault. "Why? you do not know my power. I know that I have only a wish or two left, but with your help, by combining these wishes together, I could make you as rich as a queen. . . . We could leave the country, leave France, Europe; there are large countries, of which you do not even know the names, Agnelette, called America and India. They are paradises, with blue skies, tall trees and birds of every kind. Agnelette, say that you will come with me; nobody will know that we have gone off together, nobody will know where we are, nobody will know that we love one another, nobody will know even that we are alive."

"Fly with you, Thibault!" said Agnelette, looking at the Wolf-leader as if she had but half understood what he said, "do you forget that I no longer belong to myself? do you not know that I am married?"

"What does that matter," said Thibault, "if it is

I whom you love, and if we can live happily together!"

"Oh! Thibault! Thibault! what are you saying!"

"Listen," went on Thibault, "I am going to speak to you in the name of this world and the next. Do you wish to save me, Agnelette, body and soul? If so, do not resist my pleading, have pity on me, come with me; let us go somewhere together, where we shall no longer hear these howlings, or breathe this atmosphere of reeking flesh; and, if it scares you to think of being a rich, grand lady, somewhere then where I can again be Thibault the workman, Thibault, poor but beloved, and, therefore, Thibault happy in his hard work, some place where Agnelette will have no other husband but me."

"Ah! Thibault! I was ready to become your wife, and you scorned me!"

"Do not remember my sins, Agnelette, which have been so cruelly punished."

"Thibault, another has done what you were not willing to do. He took the poor young girl; he burdened himself with the poor old blind woman; he gave a name to the one and bread to the other; he had no ambition beyond that of gaining my love; he desired no dowry beyond my marriage vow; can you think of asking me to return evil for good? Do you dare to suggest that I should leave the one who has given me such proof of his love for the one who has given me proof only of his indifference?"

"But what matter still, Agnelette, since you do not love him and since you do love me?"

"Thibault, do not turn and twist my words to make them appear to say what they do not. I said that I still preserved my friendship for you, I never said that I did not love my husband. I should like to see you happy, my friend; above all I should like to see you abjure your evil ways and repent of your sins; and last of all, I wish that God may have mercy upon you, and that you may be delivered from that spirit of evil, of which you spoke just now. For this I pray night and morning on my knees;

but even that I may be able to pray for you, I must keep myself pure; if the voice that supplicates for mercy is to rise to God's throne, it must be an innocent one; above all, I must scrupulously keep the oath which I swore at His altar."

On hearing these decisive words from Agnelette, Thibault again became fierce and morose.

"Do you not know, Agnelette, that it is very imprudent of you to speak to me here like that?"

"And why, Thibault?" asked the young woman.

"We are alone here together; it is dark, and not a man of the open would dare to come into the forest at this hour; and know, the King is not more master in his kingdom than I am here?"

"I do not understand you, Thibault?"

"I mean that having prayed, implored, and conjured, I can now threaten."

"You, threaten?"

"What I mean is," continued Thibault, paying no heed to Agnelette's words, "that every word you speak does not excite my love for you more than it rouses my hatred towards him; in short, I mean that it is imprudent of the lamb to irritate the wolf when the lamb is in the power of the wolf."

"I told you, Thibault, before, that I started to walk through the forest without any feeling of fear at meeting you. As I was coming to, I felt a momentary terror, remembering involuntarily what I had heard said about you; but at this moment, Thibault, you will try in vain to make me turn pale."

Thibault flung both hands up to his head.

"Do not talk like that," he said, "you cannot think what the devil is whispering to me, and what an effort I have to make to resist his voice."

"You may kill me if you like," replied Agnelette, "but I will not be guilty of the cowardice which you ask of me; you may kill me, but I shall remain faithful to my husband; you may kill me, but I shall pray to God to help him as I die."

"Do not speak his name, Agnelette; do not make me think about that man."

"You can threaten me as much as you like,

Thibault, for I am in your hands; but, happily, he is far from you, and you have no power over him."

"And who told you that, Agnelette? do you not know that, thanks to the diabolical power I possess and which I can hardly fight against, I am able to strike as well far as near?"

"And if I should become a widow, Thibault, do you imagine that I should be vile enough to accept your hand when it was stained with the blood of the one whose name I bear?"

"Agnelette," said Thibault falling on his knees, "Agnelette, save me from committing a further crime."

"It is you, not I, who will be responsible for the crime. I can give you my life, Thibault, but not my honour."

"Oh," roared Thibault, "love flies from the heart when hatred enters; take care, Agnelette! take heed for your husband! The devil is in me, and he will soon speak through my mouth. Instead of the consolation which I had hoped from your love, and which your love refuses, I will have vengeance. Stay my hand, Agnelette, there is yet time, stay it from cursing, from destroying; if not, understand that it is not I, but you, who strike him dead! Agnelette, you know now. . . . Agnelette, you do not stop me from speaking? Let it be so then, and let the curse fall on all three of us, you and him and me! Agnelette, I wish your husband to die, and he will die!"

Agnelette uttered a terrible cry; then, as if her reason reasserted itself, protesting against this murder at a distance which seemed impossible to her, she exclaimed:

"No, no; you only say that to terrify me, but my prayers will prevail against your maledictions."

"Go then, and learn how heaven answers your prayers. Only if you wish to see your husband again alive, Agnelette, you had better make haste, or you will but stumble against his dead body."

Overcome by the tone of conviction with which these last words were pronounced, and yielding to

an irresistible feeling of terror, Agnelette, without responding to Thibault, who stood on the further side of the lane with his hand held out and pointing towards Préciamont, set off running in the direction which it seemed to indicate, and soon disappeared into the night as she turned out of sight at the corner of the road. As she passed from his view, Thibault uttered a howl, which might have been taken for the howling of a whole pack of wolves, and plunging into the thicket, "Ah! now," he cried aloud to himself, "I am indeed a lost and accursed soul!"

CHAPTER XXII

THIBAULT'S LAST WISH

URGED in her flight by a hidden terror, and anxious to reach the village where she had left her husband with all speed possible, Agnelette, for the very reason that she was running so hastily, was forced by her failing breath to pause at intervals along the way. During these short spaces of rest, she endeavoured to reason with herself, trying to convince herself of the folly of attaching importance to words which could have no power in themselves, and which were dictated by jealousy and hatred, words which had by now been scattered to the winds; but notwithstanding all her mental arguments, she had no sooner regained her breath than she started off again at the same precipitate pace, for she felt she should know no peace until she had seen her husband again. Best part of her way led through the forest and near the wildest and most solitary enclosures, but she gave no thought to the wolves, which were the terror of every town and village within ten miles round. Only one fear possessed her, that of coming across her husband's dead body. More than once, as her foot struck against a stone or a branch, her heart stopped beating, and she felt as if her last breath had been drawn, while a sharp cold seemed to enter her very vitals, her hair stood on end and her face grew wet with perspiration. At last, at the end of the long path she had been traversing, arched over by the trees, she saw ahead of her a vista of open country lying bathed in the soft silver light of the moon. As she emerged

from the gloom into the light, a man, who had been concealed behind a bush in the hollow lying between the forest and the open country, sprang in front of her and took her in his arms.

"Ah! ah!" he said, laughing, "and where are you off to, Madame, at this hour of the night, and at this pace too?" Agnelette recognised her husband.

"Etienne! dear, dear Etienne," cried the young woman, throwing her arms round his neck. "How thankful I am to see you again, and to find you alive and well! Oh, my God, I thank Thee!"

"What, did you think, you poor little Agnelette," said Engoulevent, "that Thibault and his wolves had been making their dinner of me?"

"Ah! do not even speak of Thibault, Etienne! let us fly, dear one, fly to where there are houses!"

The young huntsman laughed again. "Well, now then, you will make all the gossips of Préciamont and Vez declare that a husband is of no use at all, not even to restore his wife's courage."

"You are right, Etienne; but although I have just had the courage to come through these great dreadful woods, now that I have you with me and should feel reassured, I tremble with fear, and yet I know not why."

"What has happened to you? Come, tell me all about it," said Etienne, giving his wife a kiss. Then Agnelette told him how she had been attacked by the wolf, how Thibault had rescued her from its claws, and what had passed between them afterwards. Engoulevent listened with the greatest attention.

"Listen," he said to Agnelette, "I am going to take you home and shut you up carefully with the grandmother, so that no harm may come to you; and then I shall ride over and tell my lord of Vez where Thibault has taken up his quarters."

"Oh! no, no!" cried Agnelette, "you would have to ride through the forest, and there is no knowing what danger you might run."

"I will make a détour," said Etienne, "I can go

round by Croyolles and Value instead of crossing the forest."

Agnelette sighed and shook her head, but made no further resistance; she knew that Engoulevent would not give in on this matter, and she reserved her strength in order to renew her entreaties when she was once indoors.

And in truth, the young huntsman only considered that he was doing his duty, for a great *battue* had been arranged for the next day in a part of the forest on the further side from that on which Agnelette had met Thibault. Etienne, therefore, was bound to go without delay and report to his master the whereabouts of the Wolf-leader. There was not too much of the night left for the work of rearranging for the morrow's *battue*.

As they drew near Préciamont, Agnelette, who had not spoken for a while, decided that she had, during her silence, amassed a sufficient number of reasons to justify her in beginning her solicitations afresh, which she did with even more earnestness than she had put into her former arguments. She reminded Etienne that Thibault, even though he might be a were-wolf, had, so far from hurting her, actually saved her life; and that after all, he had not abused his power when he had her in it, but had allowed her to leave him and rejoin her husband. And after that, to betray where he was to his mortal enemy, the Lord of Vez, was not performing a duty, but committing an act of treachery; and Thibault, who would certainly get wind of this treachery, would never under similar circumstances show mercy to any one again. Agnelette became quite eloquent as she pleaded Thibault's cause. But, when marrying Engoulevent she had made no more secret of her former engagement to the shoemaker than she had of this last interview with him, and however perfect a confidence he had in his wife, Engoulevent was nevertheless not unsusceptible to jealousy. More than that, there existed an old grudge between the two men, ever since the day when Engoulevent had spied out Thibault in his tree,

and his boar-spear in a neighbouring bush. So he stood his ground, and though listening to Agnelette, continued to walk briskly towards Préciamont. And so arguing together, and each insisting that he or she was in the right, they came to within a stone's throw of the first forest-fences. To protect themselves as far as possible from Thibault's sudden and unexpected assaults, the peasants had instituted patrol parties, who mounted guard at night as in times of war. Etienne and Agnelette were so preoccupied with their discussion, that they did not hear the call of "Who goes there!" from the sentinel behind the hedge, and went walking on in the direction of the village. The sentinel, seeing something moving in the darkness which to his prepossessed imagination appeared to be a monstrous form of some kind, and hearing no answer to his challenge, prepared to shoot. Looking up at that moment, the young huntsman suddenly caught sight of the sentinel, as the moonlight shone on the barrel of his gun. Calling out "Friend," he threw himself in front of Agnelette, flinging his arms round her, so as to make a shield of his body. But at the same instant the gun went off, and the unfortunate Etienne, giving one last sigh, fell forward without a groan against the wife he was clasping in his arms. The bullet had pierced his heart. When the people of Préciamont, on hearing the gun shot, came running up to the spot, they found Engoulevent dead, and Agnelette lying unconscious beside her husband. They carried her to her grandmother's, but she only came to her senses to fall into a state of despair which bordered on delirium, and which at last became almost madness. She accused herself of her husband's death, called him by name, begged the invisible spirits, which seemed to haunt her, even in the short intervals of slumber which her excited state of brain made possible, to have mercy upon him. She called Thibault's name, and addressed such heart-broken supplications to him that those about her were moved to tears. By degrees, in spite of the incoherence of her words,

the real facts became evident, and it grew to be generally understood that the Wolf-leader was in some way accountable for the unhappy accident which had caused poor Etienne's death. The common enemy was therefore accused of having cast a spell over the two unfortunate young creatures, and the animosity felt towards the former shoemaker became intensified.

In vain doctors were sent for from Villers-Cotterets and Ferté-Milon, Agnelette became worse and worse; her strength was rapidly failing; her voice, after the first few days, grew feebler, her breath shorter, although her delirium was as violent as ever, and everything, even the silence on the doctors' part, led to the belief that poor Agnelette would soon follow her husband to the grave. The voice of the old blind woman alone seemed to have any power to allay the fever. When she heard her grandmother speaking, she grew calmer, the haggard staring eyes grew softer and suffused with tears; she would pass her hand over her forehead as if to drive away some haunting thought, and a sorrowful wandering smile would pass across her lips.

One evening, towards night, her slumber seemed to be more agitated and distressed than usual. The hut, feebly lit by a little copper lamp, was in semi-darkness; the grandmother sat by the hearth, with that immobility of countenance under which peasants and savages hide their strongest feelings. At the foot of the bed on which Agnelette lay, so worn and white that, had it not been for the regular rise and fall of her bosom with its troubled breathing, you might have taken her for dead, knelt one of the women, whom the Baron was paying to attend upon the widow of his young huntsman, engaged in telling her beads; the other was silently spinning with her distaff. All at once the sick woman, who for some minutes past had been shivering at intervals, seemed to be fighting against some horrible dream, and gave a piercing cry of anguish. At that moment the door burst open, a man seemingly encircled by flames, rushed into the room, leapt to Agnelette's

bed, clasped the dying woman in his arms, pressed his lips upon her forehead, uttering cries of sorrow, then, rushing to another door which gave on to the open country, opened it and disappeared. The apparition had come and gone so quickly that it seemed almost like an hallucination, and as if Agnelette were endeavouring to repulse some invisible object as she cried out, "Take him away! take him away!" But the two watchers had seen the man and had recognised Thibault, and there was a clamouring outside, in the midst of which the name of Thibault could be distinguished. Soon the clamour came nearer to Agnelette's hut, and those who were uttering the cries ere long appeared on the threshold; they were in pursuit of the Wolf-leader. Thibault had been seen prowling in the neighbourhood of the hut, and the villagers, warned of this by their sentinels, had armed themselves with pitchforks and sticks preparatory to giving him chase. Thibault, hearing of the hopeless condition in which Agnelette was, had not been able to resist his longing to see her once again, and at the risk of what might happen to him, he had passed through the village, trusting to the rapidity of his movements, had opened the door of the hut and rushed in to see the dying woman.

The two women showed the peasants the door by which Thibault had escaped, and like a pack that has recovered the scent they started afresh on his track with renewed cries and threats. Thibault, it need hardly be said, escaped from them and disappeared in the forest.

Agnelette's condition, after the terrible shock given her by Thibault's presence and embrace, became so alarming that before the night was over the priest was sent for; she had evidently now but a few hours longer to live and suffer. Towards midnight the priest arrived, followed by the sacristan carrying the cross, and the choir-boys bearing the holy water. These went and knelt at the foot of the bed, while the priest took his place at the head beside Agnelette. And now, some mysterious power

seemed to re-animate the dying woman. For a long time she spoke in a low voice with the priest, and as the poor child had no need of long prayers for herself, it was certain that she must be praying for another. And who was that other? God, the priest, and Agnelette alone knew.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ANNIVERSARY

AS soon as Thibault ceased to hear the furious cries of his pursuers behind him, he slackened his pace, and the usual silence again reigning throughout the forest, he paused and sat down on a heap of stones. He was in such a troubled state of mind that he did not recognize where he was until he began to notice that some of the stones were blackened, as if they had been licked by flames; they were the stones of his own former hearth.

Chance had led him to the spot where a few months previously his hut had stood.

The shoemaker evidently felt the bitterness of the comparison between that peaceful past and this terrible present, for large tears rolled down his cheeks and fell upon the cinders at his feet. He heard midnight strike from the Oigny church clock, then one after the other from the neighbouring village towers. At this moment the priest was listening to Agnelette's dying prayers.

"Cursed be the day!" cried Thibault, "when I first wished for anything beyond what God chooses to put within the reach of a poor workman! Cursed be the day when the black wolf gave me the power to do evil, for the ill that I have done, instead of adding to my happiness, has destroyed it for ever!"

A loud laugh was heard behind Thibault's back.

He turned; there was the black wolf himself, creeping noiselessly along, like a dog coming to rejoin its master. The wolf would have been

invisible in the gloom but for the flames shot forth from his eyes, which illuminated the darkness; he went round the hearth and sat down facing the shoemaker.

"What is this!" he said. "Master Thibault not satisfied? It seems that Master Thibault is difficult to please."

"How can I feel satisfied," said Thibault. "I, who since I first met you, have known nothing but vain aspirations and endless regrets? I wished for riches, and here I am in despair at having lost the humble roof of bracken under shelter of which I could sleep in peace without anxiety as to the morrow, without troubling myself about the rain or the wind beating against the branches of the giant oaks.

"I wished for position, and here I am, stoned and hunted down by the lowest peasants, whom formerly I despised. I asked for love, and the only woman who loved me and whom I loved became the wife of another, and she is at this moment cursing me as she lies dying, while I, notwithstanding all the power you have given me, can do nothing to help her!"

"Leave off loving anybody but yourself, Thibault."

"Oh! yes, laugh at me, do!"

"I am not laughing at you. But did you not cast envious eyes on other people's property before you had set eyes on me?"

"Yes, for a wretched buck, of which there are hundreds just as good browsing in the forest!"

"You thought your wishes were going to stop at the buck, Thibault; but wishes lead on to one another, as the night to the day, and the day to night. When you wished for the buck, you also wished for the silver dish on which it would be served; the silver dish led you on to wish for the servant who carries it and for the carver who cuts up its contents. Ambition is like the vault of heaven; it appears to be bounded by the horizon, but it covers the whole

earth. You disdained Agnelette's innocence, and went after Madame Polet's mill; if you had gained the mill, you would immediately have wanted the house of the Bailiff Magloire; and his house would have had no further attraction for you when once you had seen the Castle of Mont-Gobert.

"You are one in your envious disposition with the fallen Angel, your master and mine; only, as you were not clever enough to reap the benefit that might have accrued to you from your power of inflicting evil, it would perhaps have been more to your interest to continue to lead an honest life."

"Yes, indeed," replied the shoemaker, "I feel the truth of the proverb, 'Evil to him who evil wishes.' But," he continued, "can I not become an honest man again?"

The wolf gave a mocking chuckle.

"My good fellow, the devil can drag a man to hell." he said, "by a single hair. Have you ever counted how many of yours now belong to him?"

"No."

"I cannot tell you that exactly either, but I know how many you have which are still your own. You have one left! You see it is long past the time for repentance."

"But if a man is lost when but one of his hairs belongs to the devil," said Thibault, "why cannot God likewise save a man in virtue of a single hair?"

"Well, try if that is so!"

"And, besides, when I concluded that unhappy bargain with you, I did not understand that it was to be a compact of this kind."

"Oh, yes! I know all about the bad faith of you men! Was it no compact then to consent to give me your hairs, you stupid fool? Since men invented baptism, we do not know how to get hold of them, and so, in return for any concessions we make them, we are bound to insist on their relinquishing to us some part of their body on which we can lay hands. You gave us the hairs of your head; they are firmly

rooted, as you have proved yourself and will not come away in our grasp. . . . No, no, Thibault, you have belonged to us ever since, standing on the threshold of the door that was once there, you cherished within you thoughts of deceit and violence."

"And so," cried Thibault passionately, rising and stamping his foot, "and so I am lost as regards the next world without having enjoyed the pleasures of this!"

"You can yet enjoy these."

"And how, I pray?"

"By boldly following the path that you have struck by chance, and resolutely determining on a course of conduct which you have adopted as yet only in a half-hearted way; in short, by frankly owning yourself to be one of us."

"And how am I to do this?"

"Take my place."

"And what then?"

"You will then acquire my power, and you will have nothing left to wish for."

"If your power is so great, if it can give you all the riches that I long for, why do you give it up?"

"Do not trouble yourself about me. The master for whom I shall have won a retainer will liberally reward me."

"And if I take your place, shall I also have to take your form?"

"Yes, in the night-time; by day you will be a man again."

"The nights are long, dark, full of snares; I may be brought down by a bullet from a keeper, or be caught in a trap, and then good-bye riches, good-bye position and pleasure."

"Not so; for this skin that covers me is impenetrable by iron, lead or steel. As long as it protects your body, you will be not only invulnerable, but immortal; once a year, like all were-wolves, you will become a wolf again for four and twenty hours, and during that interval, you will be in danger of

death like any other animal. I had just reached that dangerous time a year ago to-day, when we first met."

"Ah!" said Thibault, "that explains why you feared my Lord Baron's dogs."

"When we have dealings with men, we are forbidden to speak anything but the truth, and the whole truth; it is for them to accept or refuse."

"You have boasted to me of the power that I should acquire; tell me, now, in what that power will consist?"

"It will be such that even the most powerful king will not be able to withstand it, since his power is limited by the human and the possible."

"Shall I be rich?"

"So rich, that you will come in time to despise riches, since, by the mere force of your will, you will obtain not only what men can acquire with gold and silver, but also all that superior beings get by their conjurations."

"Shall I be able to revenge myself on my enemies?"

"You will have unlimited power over everything which is connected with evil."

"If I love a woman, will there again be a possibility of my losing her?"

"As you will have dominion over all your fellow creatures, you will be able to do with them what you like."

"There will be no power to enable them to escape from the trammels of my will?"

"Nothing, except death, which is stronger than all."

"And I shall only run the risk of death myself on one day out of the three hundred and sixty-five?"

"On one day only; during the remaining days nothing can harm you, neither iron, lead, nor steel, neither water, nor fire."

"And there is no deceit, no trap to catch me, in your words?"

"None, on my honour as a wolf!"

"Good," said Thibault, "then let it be so; a wolf for four and twenty hours, for the rest of the time the monarch of creation! What am I to do? I am ready."

"Pick a holly-leaf, tear it in three pieces with your teeth, and throw it away from you, as far as you can."

Thibault did as he was commanded.

Having torn the leaf in three pieces, he scattered them in the air, and although the night till then had been a peaceful one, there was immediately heard a loud peal of thunder, while a tempestuous whirlwind arose, which caught up the fragments and carried them whirling away with it.

"And now, brother Thibault," said the wolf, "take my place, and good luck be with you! As was my case just a year ago, so you will have to become a wolf for four and twenty hours; you must endeavour to come out of the ordeal as happily as I did, thanks to you, and then you will see realized all that I have promised you. Meanwhile, I will pray the lord of the cloven hoof that he will protect you from the teeth of the Baron's hounds, for, by the devil himself, I take a genuine interest in you, friend Thibault."

And then it seemed to Thibault that he saw the black wolf grow larger and taller, that it stood up on its hind legs and finally walked away in the form of a man, who made a sign to him with his hand as he disappeared.

We say *it seemed to him*, for Thibault's ideas, for a second or two, became very indistinct. A feeling of torpor passed over him, paralyzing his power of thought. When he came to himself, he was alone. His limbs were imprisoned in a new and unusual form; he had, in short, become in every respect the counterpart of the black wolf that a few minutes before had been speaking to him. One single white hair on his head alone shone in contrast to the remainder of the sombre coloured fur; this one white hair of the wolf was the one black hair which had remained to the man.

Thibault had scarcely had time to recover himself when he fancied he heard a rustling among the bushes, and the sound of a low, muffled bark. . . . He thought of the Baron and his hounds, and trembled. Thus metamorphosed into the black wolf, he decided that he would not do what his predecessor had done, and wait till the dogs were upon him. It was probably a bloodhound he had heard, and he would get away before the hounds were uncoupled. He made off, striking straight ahead, as is the manner of wolves, and it was a profound satisfaction to him to find that in his new form he had tenfold his former strength and elasticity of limb.

"By the devil and his horns!" the voice of the Lord of Vez was now heard to say to his new huntsman a few paces off, "you hold the leash too slack, my lad; you have let the bloodhound give tongue, and we shall never head the wolf back now."

"I was in fault, I do not deny it, my lord; but as I saw it go by last evening only a few yards from this spot, I never guessed that it would take up its quarters for the night in this part of the wood and that it was so close to us as all that."

"Are you sure it is the same one that has got away from us so often?"

"May the bread I eat in your service choke me, my lord, if it is not the same black wolf that we were chasing last year when poor Marcotte was drowned."

"I should like finely to put the dogs on its track," said the Baron, with a sigh.

"My lord has but to give the order, and we will do so, but he will allow me to observe that we have still two good hours of darkness before us, time enough for every horse we have to break its legs."

"That may be, but if we wait for the day, l'Eveillé, the fellow will have had time to get ten leagues away."

"Ten leagues at least," said l'Eveillé, shaking his head.

"I have got this cursed black wolf on my brain," added the Baron, "and I have such a longing to have its skin, that I feel sure I shall catch an illness if I do not get hold of it."

"Well then, my lord, let us have the dogs out without a moment's loss of time."

"You are right, l'Eveillé; go and fetch the hounds."

L'Eveillé went back to his horse, that he had tied to a tree outside the wood, and went off at a gallop, and in ten minutes' time, which seemed like ten centuries to the Baron, he was back with the whole hunting train. The hounds were immediately uncoupled.

"Gently, gently, my lads!" said the Lord of Vez, "you forget you are not handling your old well-trained dogs; if you get excited with these raw recruits, they'll merely kick up a devil of a row, and be no more good than so many turnspits; let 'em get warmed up by degrees."

And indeed, the dogs were no sooner loose than two or three got at once onto the scent of the were-wolf, and began to give cry, whereupon the others joined them. The whole pack started off on Thibault's track, at first quietly following up the scent, and only giving cry at long intervals, then more excitedly and of more accord, until they had so thoroughly imbibed the odour of the wolf ahead of them, and the scent had become so strong that they tore along, baying furiously, and with unparalleled eagerness in the direction of the Yvors coppice.

"Well begun is half done!" cried the Baron. "You look after the relays, l'Eveillé; I want them ready whenever needed! I will encourage the dogs. . . . And do you be on the alert, you others," he added, addressing himself to the younger keepers; "we have more than one defeat to avenge, and if I lose this view halloo through the fault of anyone among you, by the devil and his horns! he shall be the dogs' quarry in place of the wolf!"

After pronouncing these words of encouragement, the Baron put his horse to the gallop, and although it was still pitch dark and the ground was rough, he kept the animal going at top speed so as to come up with the hounds, which could be heard giving tongue in the low lands about Bourg-Fontaine.

CHAPTER XXIV

HUNTING DOWN THE WERE-WOLF

THIBAULT had got well ahead of the dogs, thanks to the precaution he had taken of making good his escape at the first note of the bloodhound. For some time he heard no further sound of pursuit; but, all at once, like distant thunder, the baying of the hounds reached his ears, and he began to feel some anxiety. He had been trotting, but he now went on at greater speed, and did not pause till he had put a few more leagues between himself and his enemies. Then he stood still and took his bearings; he found himself on the heights at Montaigu. He bent his head and listened—the dogs still seemed a long way off, somewhere near the Tillet coppice.

It required a wolf's ear to distinguish them so far off. Thibault went down the hill again, as if to meet the dogs; then, leaving Erneville to the left, he leaped into the little stream which rises there, waded down its course as far as Crimaucourt, dashed into the woods of Lessart-l'Abesse, and finally gained the forest of Compiègne. He was somewhat reassured to find that, in spite of his three hours' hard running, the steel-like muscles of his wolf legs were not in the least fatigued. He hesitated, however, to trust himself in a forest which was not so familiar to him as that of Villers-Cotterets.

After another dash of a mile or so, he decided that by doubling boldly he would be most likely to put the dogs off the scent. He crossed at a gallop all the stretch of plain between Pierrefonds and

Mont-Gobert, took to the woods at the Champ Meutard, came out again at Vauvaudrand, regained the stream by the Sancères timber floatage, and once more found himself in the forest near Long-Pont. Unfortunately for him, just as he reached the end of the Route du Pendu, he came across another pack of twenty dogs, which Monsieur de Montbreton's huntsman was bringing up as a relay, for the Baron had sent his neighbour news of the chase. Instantly the hounds were uncoupled by the huntsman as he caught sight of the wolf, for seeing that the latter kept its distance, he feared it would get too far ahead if he waited for the others to come up before loosing his dogs. And now began the struggle between the were-wolf and the dogs in very earnest. It was a wild chase, which the horses, in spite of their skilled riders, had great difficulty in following, a chase over plains, through woods, across heaths, pursued at a headlong pace. As the hunt flew by, it appeared and disappeared like a flash of lightning across a cloud, leaving behind a whirlwind of dust, and a sound of horns and cries which echo had hardly time to repeat. It rushed over hill and dale, through torrents and bogs and over precipices, as if horses and dogs had been winged like Hippogriffs and Chimeras. The Baron had come up with his huntsmen, riding at their head, and almost riding on the tails of his dogs, his eye flashing, his nostrils dilated, exciting the pack with wild shouts and furious blasts, digging his spurs into his horse's sides whenever an obstacle of any kind caused it to hesitate for a single instant. The black wolf, on his side, still held on at the same rapid pace; although sorely shaken at hearing the fresh pack in full pursuit only a short way behind him, just as he had got back to the forest, he had not lost an inch of ground. As he retained to the full all his human consciousness, it seemed to him impossible, as he still ran on, that he should not escape in safety from this ordeal; he felt that it was not possible for him to die before he had taken vengeance for all the agony that others made him suffer, before he had known those pleasures

that had been promised him, above all—for at this critical moment his thoughts kept on running on this—before he had gained Agnelette's love. At moments he was possessed by terror, at others by anger. He thought at times that he would turn and face this yelling pack of dogs, and, forgetting his present form, scatter them with stones and blows. Then, an instant after, feeling mad with rage, deafened by the death-knell the hounds were ringing in his ears, he fled, he leaped, he flew with the legs of a deer, with the wings of an eagle. But his efforts were in vain; he might run, leap, almost fly, the sounds of death still clung to him, and if for a moment they became more distant, it was only to hear them a moment after nearer and more threatening still. But still the instinct of self-preservation did not fail him; and still his strength was undiminished; only, if by ill luck he were to come across other relays, he felt that it might give way. So he determined to take a bold course so as to out-distance the dogs, and to get back to his lairs, where he knew his ground and hoped to evade the dogs. He therefore doubled for the second time. He first ran back to Puiseux, then skirted past Viviers, regained the forest of Compiègne, made a dash into the forest of Largue, returned and crossed the Aisne at Attichy, and finally got back to the forest of Villers-Cotterets at the low lands of Argent. He trusted in this way to baffle the strategical plans of the Lord of Vez, who had, no doubt, posted his dogs at various likely points.

Once back in his old quarters, Thibault breathed more freely. He was now on the banks of the Ourcq between Norroy and Trouennes, where the river runs at the foot of deep rocks on either side; he leaped up on to a sharp-pointed crag overhanging the water, and from this high vantage ground he sprang into the waves below, then swam to a crevice at the base of the rock from which he had leapt, which was situated rather below the ordinary level of the water, and here, at the back of this cave, he waited. He had gained at least three miles upon

the dogs; and yet, scarcely another ten minutes had elapsed when the whole pack arrived and stormed the crest of the rock. Those who were leading, mad with excitement, did not see the gulf in front of them, or else, like their quarry, they thought they would leap safely into it, for they plunged, and Thibault was splashed, far back as he was hidden, by the water that was scattered in every direction as they fell into it one by one. Less fortunate, however, and less vigorous than he was, they were unable to fight against the current, and after vainly battling with it, they were borne along out of sight before they had even got scent of the were-wolf's retreat. Overhead he could hear the tramping of the horses' feet, the baying of the dogs that were still left, the cries of men, and above all these sounds, dominating the other voices, that of the Baron as he cursed and swore. When the last dog had fallen into the water and been carried away like the others, he saw, thanks to a bend in the river, that the huntsmen were going down it, and persuaded that the Baron, whom he recognised at the head of his hunting-train, would only do this with the intention of coming up it again, he determined not to wait for this, and left his hiding-place. Now swimming, now leaping with agility from one rock to the other, at times wading through the water, he went up the river to the end of the Crêne coppice. Certain that he had now made a considerable advance on his enemies, he resolved to get to one of the villages near and run in and out among the houses, feeling sure that they would not think of coming after him there. He thought of Préciamont; if any village was well known to him, it was that; and then, at Préciamont, he would be near Agnelette. He felt that this neighbourhood would put fresh vigour into him, and would bring him good fortune, and that the gentle image of the innocent girl would have some influence on his fate. So he started off in that direction. It was now six o'clock in the evening; the hunt had lasted nearly fifteen hours, and wolf, dogs and huntsmen had covered

fifty leagues at least. When, at last, after circling round by Manereux and Oigny, the black wolf reached the borders of the heath by the lane of Ham, the sun was already beginning to sink, and shedding a dazzling light over the flowery plain; the little white and pink flowers scented the breeze that played caressingly around them; the grasshopper was singing in its little house of moss, and the lark was soaring up towards heaven, saluting the eve with its song, as twelve hours before it had saluted the morn. The peaceful beauty of nature had a strange effect on Thibault. It seemed enigmatical to him that nature could be so smiling and beautiful, while anguish such as his was devouring his soul. He saw the flowers, and heard the insects and the birds, and he compared the quiet joy of this innocent world with the horrible pangs he was enduring, and asked himself whether after all, notwithstanding all the new promises that had been made him by the devil's envoy, he had acted any more wisely in making this second compact than he had in making the first. He began to doubt whether he might not find himself deceived in the one as he had been in the other.

As he went along a little footpath nearly hidden under the golden broom, he suddenly remembered that it was by this very path that he had taken Agnelette home on the first day of their acquaintance, the day, when inspired by his good angel, he had asked her to be his wife. The thought that, thanks to this new compact, he might be able to recover Agnelette's love, revived his spirits, which had been saddened and depressed by the sight of the universal happiness around him. He heard the church bells at Préciamont ringing in the valley below; their solemn, monotonous tones recalled the thought of his fellow men to the black wolf, and of all he had to fear from them. So he ran boldly on, across the fields, to the village, where he hoped to find a refuge in some empty building. As he was skirting the little stone wall of the village cemetery, he heard a sound of voices approaching along the road he was

on. He could not fail to meet whoever they might be who were coming towards him, if he himself went on; it was not safe to turn back, as he would have to cross some rising ground whence he might easily be seen; so there was nothing left for it but to jump over the wall of the cemetery, and with a bound he was on the other side. This graveyard as usual adjoined the church; it was uncared for, and overgrown with tall grass, while brambles and thorns grew rankly in places. The wolf made for the thickest of these bramble bushes; he found a sort of ruined vault, whence he could look out without being seen, and he crept under the branches and hid himself inside. A few yards away from him was a newly-dug grave; within the church could be heard the chanting of the priests, the more distinctly that the vault must at one time have communicated by a passage with the crypt. Presently the chanting ceased, and the black wolf, who did not feel quite at ease in the neighbourhood of a church, and thought that the road must now be clear, decided that it was time to start off again and to find a safer retreat than the one he had fled to in his haste.

But he had scarcely got his nose outside the bramble bush when the gate of the cemetery opened, and he quickly retreated again to his hole, in great trepidation as to who might now be approaching. The first person he saw was a child dressed in a white alb and carrying a vessel of holy water; he was followed by a man in a surplice, bearing a silver cross, and after the latter came a priest, chanting the psalms for the dead.

Behind these were four peasants carrying a bier covered with a white pall over which were scattered green branches and flowers, and beneath the sheet could be seen the outline of a coffin; a few villagers from Préciamont wound up this little procession. Although there was nothing unusual in such a sight as this, seeing that he was in a cemetery, and that the newly-dug grave must have prepared him for it, Thibault, nevertheless, felt strangely moved as he

looked on. Although the slightest movement might betray his presence and bring destruction upon him, he anxiously watched every detail of the ceremony.

The priest having blessed the newly-made grave, the peasants laid down their burden on an adjoining hillock. It is the custom in our country when a young girl, or young married woman, dies in the fullness of her youth and beauty, to carry her to the graveyard in an open coffin, with only a pall over her, so that her friends may bid her a last farewell, her relations give her a last kiss. Then the coffin is nailed down, and all is over. An old woman, led by some kind hand, for she was apparently blind, went up to the coffin to give the dead one a last kiss; the peasants lifted the pall from the still face, and there lay Agnelette. A low groan escaped from Thibault's agonized breast, and mingled with the tears and sobs of those present. Agnelette, as she lay there so pale in death, wrapped in an ineffable calm, appeared more beautiful than when in life, beneath her wreath of forget-me-nots and daisies. As Thibault looked upon the poor dead girl, his heart seemed suddenly to melt within him. It was he, as he had truly realized, who had really killed her, and he experienced a genuine and overpowering sorrow, the more poignant since for the first time for many long months he forgot to think of himself, and thought only of the dead woman, now lost to him for ever.

As he heard the blows of the hammer knocking the nails into the coffin, as he heard the earth and stones being shovelled into the grave and falling with a dull thud on the body of the only woman he had ever loved, a feeling of giddiness came over him. The hard stones he thought must be bruising Agnelette's tender flesh, so fresh and sweet but a few days ago, and only yesterday still throbbing with life, and he made a movement as if to rush out on the assistants and snatch away the body, which dead, must surely belong to him, since, living, it had belonged to another.

But the grief of the man overcame this instinct of the wild beast at bay; a shudder passed through

the body hidden beneath its wolf skin; tears fell from the fierce blood-red eyes, and the unhappy man cried out: "O God! take my life, I give it gladly, if only by my death I may give back life to her whom I have killed!"

The words were followed by such an appalling howl, that all who were in the cemetery fled, and the place was left utterly deserted. Almost at the same moment, the hounds, having recovered the scent, came leaping in over the wall, followed by the Baron, streaming with sweat as he rode his horse, which was covered with foam and blood.

The dogs made straight for the bramble bush, and began worrying something hidden there.

"Halloo! halloo!! halloo!!!" cried the Lord of Vez, in a voice of thunder, as he leapt from his horse, not caring if there was anyone or not to look after it, and drawing out his hunting-knife, he dashed towards the vault, forcing his way through the hounds. He found them fighting over a fresh and bleeding wolf-skin, but the body had disappeared.

There was no mistake as to its being the skin of the were-wolf that they had been hunting, for with the exception of one white hair, it was entirely black.

What had become of the body? No one ever knew. Only as from this time forth Thibault was never seen again, it was generally believed that the former sabot-maker and no other was the were-wolf.

Furthermore, as the skin had been found without the body, and, as, from the spot where it was found a peasant reported to have heard someone speak the words: "O God! take my life! I give it gladly, if only by my death I may give back life to her whom I have killed," the priest declared openly that Thibault, by reason of his sacrifice and repentance, had been saved!

And what added to the consistency of belief in this tradition was, that every year on the anniversary of Agnelette's death, up to the time when the Monasteries were all abolished at the Revolution, a monk from the Abbey of the Premonstratensians at Bourg-Fontaine, which stands half a league from

Préciamont, was seen to come and pray beside her grave.

. . . . . .

Such is the history of the black wolf, as it was told me by old Mocquet, my father's keeper.

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